THE PLACE OF MORAL ACTION IN ETHICS

W.A. Hart

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The argument of the thesis is that, whereas in the main English moral philosophy in the twentieth century has seemed to proceed on the basis that morality is, first and foremost, a matter of being conscious of something or of having a certain kind of experience, the experience, let us say, of being under obligation; or on the basis that it is, first and foremost, a matter of using a certain kind of reasoning; morality should rather be thought of as being, first and foremost, moral action. In support of this, it is argued that theories such as those of G.E. Moore, N. Hartmann and H.A. Prichard, which centre attention on moral experience, are as such incapable of resolving certain problems in morality explored by Prichard himself. It is further argued that, with respect to these same problems, theories centring on moral reasoning, such as R.M. Hare's or those of the Descriptivists, are in a similar position. The problems in question are themselves then examined individually and an attempt is made directly at their solution. This solution is seen to involve a stepping outside the ways in which we ordinarily conceive of morality, to a conception of morality in which the notion specifically of moral action is paramount. And, finally, some suggestions are made as to how this latter conception is to be understood, both in itself and in its relation to rational activity in general.
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INTRODUCTION

Within any field of study it is of primary importance to formulate for that study some central theoretical question, by means of which one's researches can be given a definite orientation. About this question the first thing to say is that it does not seem to be arbitrary. No doubt in theory it ought to be possible, in one's study of some matter, to adopt any one of a number of different lines of approach without it affecting the issue, but it does not seem to be the case in practice. A false orientation at the outset, while it may not keep you irrevocably to the sands and shallows, generally does mean that you run yourself into difficulties, from which, very often, you can only extricate yourself by taking a new direction entirely. On the other hand, failure to decide upon an orientation for your researches condemns you to, at best, piecemeal analyses lacking any overall significance. I take it, then, that success in the study of moral philosophy depends on one having given not only a decisive, but an appropriate direction to one's inquiries; and this raises the problem, what is the appropriate direction? What is the central theoretical question for the moral philosopher?

It is the argument of this thesis that English moral philosophy in the twentieth century has had two main phases, and that in each of these phases the central theoretical question has been mistaken. In the first phase philosophers took as the obvious subject for analysis moral experience, and saw themselves as having to answer the question, what is the nature of moral experience? This sort of approach is most strikingly illustrated by the ethical writings of G.E. Moore. Moore initiated the new approach by, first of all, concentrating attention on what it is we are saying when we say that a state of affairs is good or
that some action is a duty, and by suggesting that it all can be explained in terms of what we are conscious of, what we see in our 'mind's eye', when we use these expressions. For him, therefore, the programme for the moral philosopher is to describe and analyse the content of moral consciousness or experience. This leads him to the view that in moral experience what we are conscious of is that something, some object or state of affairs, has a certain property, namely the property of goodness. It is sometimes said that Moore simply assumed that a term like 'good' must refer to a property, but it is not true that he was blind to the difficulties attendant upon this way of speaking, and in his grappling with these difficulties I believe he highlights, as no other philosopher does, certain of the difficulties inherent in treating ethical inquiry as an analysis of moral experience.

The German philosopher Nicolai Hartmann may seem rather an odd person to find being discussed in the context of what is otherwise English moral philosophy. I include him, not because of any influence he may be supposed to have had on English philosophers, but because consideration of his views is a useful way of exposing the limitations of Moore's analytical equipment. Whereas in Moore's writings the attempt to explain morality in terms of something experienced seems to peter out in a preparedness to entertain explaining it in terms simply of people's feelings or attitudes, Hartmann's own attempt is better sustained and, so far as the difficulties that confronted Moore are concerned, successful. And this, I argue, is due to his having at his disposal a much wider range of concepts than those all-sufficing concepts of 'goodness' and 'property' which were the latter's downfall.

Particularly noteworthy in this connection is Hartmann's modal account of value.
From two philosophers who in their different ways represent the approach to ethics through analysis of moral experience I move on to H.A. Prichard, who is himself generally regarded as an exponent, if not indeed the most dogmatic exponent, of the same kind of approach. In his case, however, the point I want to make is that, from within the intuitionist approach itself, Prichard was developing arguments and raising problems whose import is such as to call in question the whole enterprise of explaining morality in terms of something experienced: Hartmann’s version of it no less than Moore’s. I am thinking now especially of his discussion of two seemingly quite specific and unconnected problems in ethics. The first of these is whether duty has an objective or a subjective basis; whether, that is to say, when a man has a duty to do something it depends on what the facts of his situation are, or on what he thinks the facts to be. The second is how it can be shown that, when a man has a duty to do something, he also has a motive to do it. There emerges from Prichard’s discussion of these problems, as I try to show, the suggestion that in morality we do not so much experience something as having a certain character or property as look upon things from a certain point of view.

The second phase of English moral philosophy has seen the replacement of the question, what is the nature of moral experience? by the question, what is the nature of moral reasoning? Philosophers have moved, in other words, from describing and analysing the experiences which, as it might be said, underwrite our use of moral expressions to describing and analysing instead the context of reasoning in which such expressions occur. In my chapter on moral reasoning I have opted to discuss, on the one hand, the views of Professor R.M. Hare and, on the other, the loosely associated cluster of views to which the name
Descriptivism is sometimes applied, as representing widely differing approaches to the carrying out of this programme. In what I have to say about each my main object is to point out, first of all, that what are problems for Prichard operating within the context of an analysis of moral experience are problems also for such as Hare and the Descriptivists who adopt a programme of analysis of a very different kind; and that, moreover, the latter are no more able to resolve these problems in terms of moral reasoning than was the former in terms of moral experience. If that is so, then it seems to me that the change from analysing moral experience to analysing moral reasoning is of less significance than might be supposed, and that, in making it, we are as far as ever from an approach to ethics which would explain morality in all its aspects.

In Chapter Four, I consider these problems individually and attempt their solution. What I think we find, when we move these into the centre of our vision and gradually work towards a solution of them, is that morality begins to take on for us the character not of experience primarily, nor even of a certain way of reasoning, but that of action or activity. In the first place, of course, I hope to have resolved the problems in a way that will be thought satisfactory; but this other aspect, the fact that the problems seem themselves to require for their solution our thinking of morality in terms of action, is, if anything, more important. For it suggests a conception of ethics itself, which has been construed in our period successively as the analysis of moral experience and as the analysis of moral reasoning, as, pre-eminently, the analysis of moral action. In other words, it suggests that the central theoretical question for ethics is, what is the nature of moral action? The whole of the thesis can be summed up briefly in these two
points: that morality is first and foremost a matter of moral action, and that therefore the question for ethics is, above all others, what is the nature of moral action and how does it differ from action which is not moral action?

In the final chapter, the view that morality is primarily a matter of activity or action is further explored in two different directions. First of all, it is defined a little more precisely through being compared with the views on moral activity put forward by Professor Michael Oakeshott. Although I criticise Oakeshott for failing to provide a satisfactory explanation of the coherence of moral activity, his views can be taken, I suggest, as a complement to, rather than as an alternative to, the view of moral activity which I would want to hold. Secondly, I attempt to allay doubts that may be felt about whether the conception of moral activity being developed is fully consistent with its having a key place (as morality surely must have) in the rational conduct of life. This allows me to indicate, but no more than indicate, how I think morality stands in relation to other forms of human activity.

The fact that the primary interest of the thesis is in establishing the central theoretical question for ethics may explain the mode of treatment - part historical, part concerned with problems - which has been adopted. A purely historical treatment would not in itself have thrown up any new programme of analysis for ethics. A treatment concentrated solely on problems, on the other hand, would have been without the historical dimension which alone enables us to see the analysis of moral action as a distinctively new programme for ethics. I have therefore used the historical survey first of all to point out shortcomings in current conceptions of morality, and secondly to bring
us into contact with those problems, consideration of which, out of the historical context, provides, I hope, the justification for my suggestion that morality is primarily moral action.
G.E. Moore

When G.E. Moore announced in the Preface to *Principia Ethica* that it had been his endeavour "to write 'Prolegomena to any future Ethics that can possibly pretend to be scientific'", he signified, in a striking way, his intention to have made a new start in ethics. And I would seem, by opening my discussion of twentieth century ethics in English with the writings of G.E. Moore, to be taking him at his word. But it is in place to ask how far this intention of his was realised in practice, and we can best grasp the answer to that question, and also the character of the 'new start', if we compare *Principia Ethica* with a representative work of the previous generation, Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics* published in 1874.

What I think we find is that there are no radically new issues in the later work, but that there has been a whole shifting of emphasis from certain matters to others. Issues which are present, but are submerged or only touched on, in *Methods* (such as the claim that the central moral notion is unique and unanalysable) have in *Principia* come to the fore, while others have retreated into the background. And for at least a good part of the twentieth century English-speaking philosophers, by and large, have observed Moore's order of emphases. It is for this reason that his writings are a natural point at which to begin one's consideration of twentieth century ethics in English.

Sidgwick gives two accounts of what he means to do in *Methods*. They overlap each other to a great extent. In the first he says of his book that it,
"claims to be an examination, at once expository and critical, of the different methods of obtaining reasoned convictions as to what ought to be done which are to be found - either explicit or implicit - in the moral consciousness of mankind generally."

The second account expands a little on the first:

"My object is to expound as clearly and as fully as my limits will allow the different methods of Ethics that I find implicit in our common moral reasoning; to point out their mutual relations; and where they seem to conflict, to define the issue as much as possible."

Sidgwick, then, is concerned primarily with methods - what we should now call theories - of ethics, i.e., frameworks of general principles that we make use of within morality to determine what we ought to do or what it is right to do; and he sets out to trace the consequences which flow from each, with a view to discovering how far they really are exclusive alternatives and how far reconcilable one with another. And in the end, what he offers is not directly a contribution to ethical theory in the sense defined, but rather a practical illustration of the kind of criteria which are relevant to deciding between different ethical theories, "the considerations which should be decisive in determining the adoption of ethical first principles." This is not, on the whole, the approach of a man who finds morality in itself problematic. It is as if Sidgwick were saying, "We all know what morality is, and what it means to say of something that we ought to do it. Very good. Ethics' main concern, therefore, is with examining and comparing the ways by which people decide for themselves what it is they ought to do."

The contrast with Moore is marked. For in the opening lines of Principia he makes the point that we cannot usefully comment on theories of ethics, until we get clear for ourselves the question to which those theories supply an answer. We cannot, in other words, judge between
Egoism, say, and some other theory as ways of answering the question "What is it right to do?", until that same question has itself been examined and analysed. "It appears to me," he remarks in the Preface to *Principia*,

"That in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer."

We find, consequently, that the weight of Moore's emphasis falls not on the ways by which we determine what it is right to do or what is good - the different ways by which we give content to the notions of 'duty', 'right', 'good', etc. - but on what it is we are saying when we say that an action is right or that some state of affairs is good.

"I have tried to show," he says,

"Exactly what it is we ask about a thing, when we ask whether it ought to exist for its own sake, is good in itself, or has intrinsic value; and exactly what it is we ask about an action, when we ask whether we ought to do it, whether it is a right action or a duty."

Now, I think it is correct to say that in treating this issue as central to ethics, namely the question of what we mean by saying that a certain action is right or that a certain state of affairs is good, Moore has brought about a reorientation in ethical thinking which has been taken over by most subsequent writers on ethics. In this way, Moore's preoccupations have become the preoccupations of two generations of moral philosophers. Furthermore, the controversies which have divided philosophers in this period - those between cognitivists and non-cognitivists, emotivists and prescriptivists, and that which still continues regarding the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of moral utterances - have been about how Moore's question should be answered.
But there are distinctions to be drawn. Of those who have applied themselves to the problem of what our moral utterances involve, there are two main groups. The first group has attacked the problem by means of an analysis of moral experience, while the second group has proceeded by means of an analysis of moral reasoning. I shall be arguing as we go along that neither of these approaches to the problem is in the end satisfactory; that the problem is ultimately to be resolved only by means of an analysis of moral action.

Moore belongs, of course, to the first group. It might seem that there are a number of different ways by which we could determine what we are saying when we say, for example, that something is good, and in the first chapter of *Principia* he scouts them one by one. He considers the possibility that it could be done by noting the things which are good, with a view to isolating the common feature. But that will not do, since a feature which is common to all good things is not necessarily that feature which we refer to when we call them good. Equally it will not do to examine the ways in which the claim that a state of affairs is good can be justified; for the criteria we use to determine whether something is good are not necessarily the same thing as goodness itself. We do not determine the meaning of 'good' by consulting dictionaries or by attending to its use in common speech. A verbal definition, he tells us, "Can never be of ultimate importance in any study except lexicography"; and again, "My business is not with its proper usage, as established by custom". Rather is Moore's concern "Solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for."  

What then is Moore suggesting? How is this question of what one is saying when one says that something is good to be answered? It is
to be answered, he says, by a 'simple appeal to facts'. But this is misleading, in that it suggests an investigation of facts which are public and accessible to a number of different observers. When Moore speaks of 'facts' in this context, what he has in mind are the facts of moral experience. It cannot but be the case that, when I speak of something being good, I have some idea or notion hovering before my mind which I use the word 'good' to refer to. I may be wrong to suppose that 'good' is generally used by people to refer to precisely this idea. But at least I know that this is what I mean when I say that something is good. Getting clear about what I am saying when I say that something is good is a matter, therefore, of getting clear what this idea is that I am thinking of, and in what way it is unlike other ideas, the idea of 'rightness' say. And, of course, since this kind of reflective analysis is necessarily a private affair (no one else having access to what I am thinking of when I use the word 'good'), the results of it win acceptance only in so far as others are able to conduct analyses of their experiences and confirm those results for themselves. The usual form, therefore, of Moore's discussions is, first of all, a report about the character of his experience, coupled with an appeal to whoever is interested to inspect his own experience and see whether he does not come up with the same result. It is in this way that Moore puts forward his characteristic view, that goodness is a property of states of affairs, which is simple and unanalysable and quite unlike any other property.

But now it is time that we turned to Moore's answer to the question "What am I saying when I say that something is good?". And what we find is extremely interesting. For the fact is that Moore's ethical writings, particularly in so far as they concern this matter of
goodness, open on a note of confidence and close on a note of hesitancy and doubt. In Principia the answer he gives seems admirably simple and clear cut: in saying that something is good I am saying that it has a certain property or characteristic, that special property or characteristic that I have in mind when I use the word 'good' in a moral context. We do not, it is true, encounter much in the way of argument in favour of goodness being a property. The reader is never struck, presumably because the writer himself is never struck, by any sense of the claim being controversial. Even where Moore makes the remark, "There is no intrinsic difficulty in the contention that 'good' denotes a simple and indefinable quality", he does not mean that there is no difficulty in the contention that 'good' denotes a quality (Moore uses the expressions 'quality', 'property', 'characteristic' and others interchangeably), but that there is no difficulty in the contention that it denotes a quality which is simple and indefinable. Throughout the early part of Principia Moore is on his guard against possible objectors to the view that goodness is the sort of property he claims it to be; but he shows no awareness that his claim for goodness as being any sort of property is just as open to attack.

The contrast is startling if we turn to Moore's last writing on ethics, his Reply to my Critics. There we find that a whole section is taken up with discussing whether 'right' is the name of a characteristic at all, and it ends inconclusively:

"I must say again that I am inclined to think that 'right', in all ethical uses, and, of course, 'wrong', 'ought', 'duty' also, are, in this more radical sense, not the names of characteristics at all, that they have merely 'emotive meaning' and no 'cognitive meaning' at all: and, if this is true of them, it must also be true of 'good', in the sense I have been most concerned with."

Moore has moved away from taking it for granted that goodness is a property - in, as we shall see, a very strict sense of the word
'property' - to the position of being half-prepared to accept that it is not a property at all, not even in the recondite sense in which anything attributable to an object, and whose attribution gives rise to truth or falsity, may be said to be a property of the object in question. But only half-prepared, in so far as he is still disposed to consider goodness a property in the strict sense mentioned.

Now it seems to me that it would be a mistake to regard Moore's early position as something naive and ill-considered which, on subsequent reflection, he came to abandon; just as it would be a mistake, in my view, to accept quite at its face value Moore's later preparedness to consider 'good' and 'right' as having merely emotive meaning. For Moore's thought does not proceed, as one might think, straightforwardly from the one extreme to the other. Rather it is from start to finish in a continual state of tension between the two. I mean by this that from Principia onwards we find Moore attempting to do justice to what seem to be contradictory features or aspects of goodness, which draw him simultaneously towards the view that goodness is a property in the strict sense of being something intrinsic to the thing which is good, and towards the view that it is not a property, not even in the weak sense in which anything truly or falsely predicable is a property. Where this tension shows itself most clearly, I think, is in the claim that goodness is a property of a special kind, viz. a non-natural property.

I do not believe that the place of the distinction between properties which are natural and those which are non-natural in Moore's philosophy has ever been satisfactorily explained. It is not essential, as Moore says explicitly, to his account of the Naturalistic Fallacy:
"Even if (goodness) were a natural object, that would not alter the nature of the fallacy nor diminish its importance one whit. All that I have said about it would remain quite equally true: only the name which I have called it would not be so appropriate as I think it is."

And yet it will not do either to treat it as a kind of a bonus, a something provided by the author over and above the call of his thesis. For if it is not in some way essential to what Moore is saying, how can we explain the fact that Moore time and again harped back to the distinction, and time and again bewailed his inability to make it clearer? Even in the Reply the distinction is retained, and Moore seems not to have thought that his failure to clarify it was a sufficient reason for abandoning it altogether. Moore's persistence with the natural and non-natural distinction suggests that it had, for him at any rate, an importance which commentators have not always accorded it. And what I am saying is that in claiming that goodness is non-natural, Moore is trying, if in the last instance ineffectually, to do justice to the respects in which goodness is like a property and also the respects in which it is not like a property at all. In other words, the claim that goodness is a non-natural property seems to me symptomatic of a difficulty in the claim that goodness is any sort of property.

In what follows, therefore, I want to examine what Moore means when he says that goodness is a property, as an approach to understanding his answer to the question, "What am I saying when I say that something is good?". And where I bring in reference to the claim that goodness is a non-natural property it will be as a means to understanding Moore's reservations about claiming goodness to be a property.

In considering Moore's claim that goodness is a property it is helpful to distinguish a weaker thesis and a stronger, even though it
is clear that Moore himself intended to maintain both. The weaker thesis is that propositions of the form, "This is good" or, "This is right", are in a sense to be determined, objective. The stronger thesis is that, in the case of "This is good", they attribute to the thing or state of affairs which is good a property which is intrinsic. Properly speaking it is only to 'goodness' that the stronger thesis applies; the weaker thesis applying to 'goodness' and 'rightness' together.

Let us look at the weaker thesis first. One can best gain an idea of what it means for goodness to be objective negatively, i.e., by grasping what it would be for goodness not to be objective, but subjective in Moore's sense. A predicate can be said to be subjective if, when applied to some object, it says no more about the object than that someone feels towards it in a certain way or holds certain opinions about it. The feelings or opinions in question may be those of the speaker or of someone else. In *Philosophical Studies* Moore says:

> "There is a sense of the term 'subjective' such that to say that 'beautiful' stands for a subjective predicate, means, roughly, that any statement of the form "This is beautiful" merely expresses a psychological assertion to the effect that some particular individual or class of individuals either actually has, or would, under certain circumstances, have, a certain kind of mental attitude towards the thing in question.""

Therefore, the weaker thesis is intended to deny that goodness merely refers, in this way, to someone's attitude of mind about the thing which is good.

What exactly is the point of this denial? Why is it that Moore wants to insist that goodness is not in this sense a subjective predicate, i.e. does not denote a property? In his *Ethics* he tries to explain why he thinks that the subjective view is unacceptable. There are two sorts of cases to be considered. Either judgements of the
form, "This is good" and "This is right" refer to the state of mind of the speaker or they refer to the state of mind of some other person or class of persons. If it is the first, then it will follow, Moore thinks, that two persons, one of whom said that a state of affairs was good or an action right and the other of whom said that the same state of affairs was bad or that the same action was wrong, would not be in contradiction of each other, would not be disagreeing. This would be because one, A, would be speaking about his, i.e., A's, feelings or opinion, while the other, B, would be speaking about his, i.e., B's, feelings or opinion. But that they are not disagreeing goes against ordinary common sense. Further, if the subjective view is correct, in that "This is good" and "This is right" refer to the attitude of mind of the speaker, then, Moore thinks, it would be possible for one and the same state of affairs to be good and bad at the same time, and possible for one and the same action to be right and wrong at the same time.

And here again this goes against common sense. It is true that there are versions of the subjective view which do not involve these consequences. If "This is good" means "People in general approve of this", or "This is bad" means "People in general disapprove of this", then a person who says, "State of affairs $x$ is good" is disagreeing with someone who says, "State of affairs $x$ is bad". And, of course, it could not be true, on this interpretation of 'good' and 'bad', that a state of affairs could be simultaneously good and bad, since it could not be true that people in general both approved and disapproved of it.

But as soon as we move away from the claim that "This is good" refers to the speaker's own attitude, whether it is personal to himself or is that of his society, the subjective view becomes infinitely less plausible. For Moore would say that everyone knows the difference
between asking oneself, "Is this good?" and asking oneself, "Do people in general approve of this?", and that everyone would agree that to say, "People in general approve of this, but is it good?" is to ask a meaningful question. The main problem, therefore, is with the account of "This is good" which is in terms of the speaker's attitude of mind. And Moore's objections to it are that, if true, then persons whom we would naturally say are disagreeing would not be disagreeing at all; and that a state of affairs could be both good and bad at the same time, an action be at the same time both right and wrong - things which we would ordinarily say are impossible.

However, when Moore came to write his Reply, he admitted that these objections were, as they stood, inconclusive. With regard to the first, Moore acknowledged the force of Stevenson's suggestion that the disagreement involved in one man saying, "This is good", and another saying, "This is bad" might be disagreement in attitude merely, as opposed to disagreement in belief. In the latter sense, they are not disagreeing, it is true. But even on the subjective view they are still disagreeing in some sense, namely disagreeing in the attitude they take to the thing in question. And might this not be sufficient to explain our ordinary common sense conviction that they are disagreeing? Moore accepts this point, in so far as he is unable to suggest any means by which it could be proved that the disagreement involved in these two propositions is disagreement involving the holding of contradictory opinions. As to the second objection Moore is disposed to regard it as a simple mistake on his part. The subjective view, although it does imply that one person may correctly say of a state of affairs that it is good and another person correctly say of the same state of affairs that it is bad, does not imply that anyone could correctly say of the
state of affairs that it simultaneously good and bad. Indeed that is ruled out by the theory, in so far as no one could simultaneously approve and disapprove of one and the same state of affairs. Moore's objection, as he sees it, would only hold if it followed from the fact that some person approved of a state of affairs that one did oneself approve of it, and from the fact that another person disapproved of the same state of affairs that one did oneself disapprove of it. But in neither case is this true.¹³

But although these objections can be set aside, Moore insists that a central objection to the subjective thesis remains, and it is this that his original suggestions were intended, unsuccessfully as it happened, to bring out. In *Ethics* he had argued:

"It cannot be true that every man always denotes by the word 'right' merely a relation to his own feelings, since, if that were so, no two men would ever denote by this word the same predicate; and hence a man who said that an action was not right could never be denying that it had the very predicate, which another, who said it was right, was asserting that it had."¹⁴

But the point he had then fastened on, mistakenly, was that, on the subjective view, the two men were not disagreeing, whereas the crux of the matter is rather that 'right' in the uses of the two men would not be denoting 'the same predicate'. And it is this point which he concentrates on and expands in the *Reply*:

"It seemed to me, and does still seem to me, that to say of a word that, in one particular use, it is 'the name of a characteristic' would naturally be understood to mean that, when used in that way, it does mean the same both when used at different times and when used by different persons. If it does not, then there is no one characteristic of which it is the name."¹⁵

It is clear that, on the subjective view, words like 'good' and 'right' are not the names of characteristics, i.e., are not the names of single characteristics, since as used by me they signify that I approve of
some state of affairs or action and as used by somebody else they signify that he approves of the state of affairs or action; and so on, the signification varying with every occasion of use. So that the denial that 'good' and 'right' are subjective predicates would seem to amount to the claim that their meaning remains constant no matter who uses the words 'good' and 'right', and no matter at what time.

On the other hand, in the same essay Moore admits that he is not on very firm ground about this, and that perhaps, in a more radical sense, 'good' and 'right' are not the names of characteristics at all. He means by this that they may not denote characteristics, even characteristics which vary with the person who uses the words or the time of utterance. In other words, that they have merely emotive meaning, are not used to make any statement which could be true or false. If we ask why it is he is prepared to make this admission, the answer would seem to lie in the difficulty encountered in working out the stronger thesis, that goodness is an intrinsic property. Why this should be so, why the failure of the stronger thesis should involve the failure of the weaker thesis, will require our investigation when we have established what it is the stronger thesis is saying. Let us turn to the latter.

According to the stronger thesis, the terms 'property', 'quality', 'characteristic' as applied to goodness indicate that, in some sense to be determined, goodness is intrinsic to the thing or state of affairs which is good. Indeed, Moore is at pains to point out that the use of 'good' which he has in mind and which is central to ethics is one which is equivalent to 'intrinsically good', or 'good in itself'.\textsuperscript{16} I take it to be the same point he is making in his 1932 contribution to the symposium \textit{Is Goodness a Quality?}, where he says, "What I meant by saying that 'good' denoted a quality, I think I can say quite simply. I meant
merely that the character of being worth having for its own sake was a character and was not a relational property: that and nothing more.\textsuperscript{17} Now the phrase 'not a relational property', before it can be used to shed light on the claim, that goodness is intrinsic, needs to be examined a little. For one's immediate response to the statement that goodness is not a relational property is to say, certainly not, in the sense in which 'brother of John' or 'best in the class' are relational properties. For the latter signify the relation involved in a way in which 'good' clearly does not. But it may be said that, all the same, goodness is a relational property in that it depends on relational properties of the thing being talked about. Here it is necessary to make a distinction between the internal relations of a state of affairs (relations within the state of affairs) and its external relations (relations of the state of affairs to something else). In denying that goodness is a relational property Moore was certainly denying that the goodness of a thing (in the relevant sense of 'goodness') derives from the relations in which the thing stands to something else. He is not, I think, denying that it could derive from relations obtaining within the thing itself. The principle of organic unities, the fact that a whole may have an intrinsic goodness different from the sum of the goodness of its parts, rests on this possibility. If the goodness of an organic whole comprising X and Y is not the sum of the goodness of X and the goodness of Y, then it must derive from the relation in which X stands to Y - as in the case where the consciousness of a work of art has a value in excess of the sum of the value of the work of art by itself and the value of consciousness.

However, to return to the main question. If Moore's use of such words as 'property' or 'characteristic' stems from his wish to indicate
that goodness is not relational, in the sense outlined, but something intrinsic, still one has to ask: what is it for a property to be intrinsic? Moore has attempted a definition of what it means for goodness to be intrinsic in three places. First of all, in *Ethics*, he notes:

"By saying that a thing is intrinsically good our theory means that it would be a good thing that the thing in question should exist, even if it existed quite alone, without any further accompaniments or effects whatsoever."

This restates a point made earlier in *Principia*:

"The only method that can be safely used to discover what value a thing has in itself .... is that of considering what value we should attach to it, if it existed in absolute isolation, stripped of all its usual accompaniments."

It seems to me that this fails as an elucidation of what it means for something to be intrinsic, because of the ambiguity of the phrases 'if it existed quite alone' and 'if it existed in absolute isolation'. What exactly does Moore have in mind? What degree of isolation, of aloneness is involved here? We are told that a thing's value is intrinsic if the thing continues to have that value when the thing exists quite alone. But this could mean a variety of things. To consider whether something would have value if it existed quite alone, might mean to consider whether it would have value for anyone in the absence of other things. This would tell us something about the value of the thing in question. It would enable us to decide whether the thing had any value for us in its own right, aside from whatever value it derives from its relation to something else. A tin-opener, for example, derives its value generally from the contents of the tins one wants to open. And so, applying to it the test of isolation (by supposing there to be no tins to be opened), we should in all likelihood decide that it had no value. But considering an object in isolation,
in this sense, would not, I think, show whether or not an object is 'good in itself' or 'worth having for its own sake' (which are Moore's synonyms for 'intrinsically good'), but merely whether or not it is 'good by itself', 'worth having on its own'. This interpretation, then, we can safely rule out.

But an ambiguity still remains. For asking whether something would have value if it existed quite alone could yet mean two different things. It could mean, on the one hand, asking oneself whether something would still be valuable, whether it would still be a good thing that it should exist, if there were no human beings to enjoy it or to make use of it. Or it could mean asking oneself whether something would still be valuable, whether it would still be a good thing that it should exist, if there were no human beings to make the valuation. The similarities between the two sentences should not be allowed to mask the differences between them. In the first case you are being asked to make an evaluation, an evaluation in which human enjoyment or use of something are considered as elements potentially relevant to the result of your evaluation. Do I hold this to be valuable in itself, or valuable only for the contribution it makes to human life? That Moore held intrinsic value or goodness to be independent of its contribution to human life, and therefore independent of the existence of human beings in this sense, is clear from his criticism of Sidgwick in *Principles*. Sidgwick had stated that neither beauty nor truth had any value outside their connection to human beings and the pleasure which human beings derive from them. In answering this, Moore asked his readers to imagine to themselves a perfectly beautiful world and also a world in which everything is ugly and loathsome, and he argued that, whether or not there were human beings existing there to enjoy
the one or to be disgusted at the other, we should still say that it was
better that the first should exist than that the second should. And he
concluded:

"If in any imaginable case you do admit that the existence of a
more beautiful thing is better in itself that that of one more
ugly, quite apart from its effects on any human feeling, then
Professor Sidgwick's principle has broken down." But this, as a number of philosophers have pointed out, does not really
got to the heart of the matter. It shows, perhaps, that our value
judgements are not always dominated by thought of the part which the
things valued have in human life; that our value judgements are some-
times, in this sense, disinterested. It does not show, and could not
show, that a thing's value or goodness is independent of the existence
of human beings to make the evaluation. This is the second case, and
it differs from the first in that you are not being asked to make an
evaluation of a situation from which human beings are excluded, but to
say whether an object's or a situation's value is a feature of it which
is independent of the evaluating process in which human beings engage.
It is not a value judgement you are being asked to make, but a judgement
about evaluating and what is involved in it. It can be answered only
by the philosophical examination of the evaluating process. Is it a
matter of seeing human interests projected, as it were, on to objects
which would otherwise, in the absence of human beings, carry no such
thing? Or is it a matter of discerning in objects a feature which they
would continue to possess, even if there were no human beings to take
note of it?

It does not seem to me that Moore recognises that there are two
separate issues here. And his failure to do so blurs his account of
what it means for goodness to be intrinsic, to be a property. A
sufficiently clear meaning could be given to the claim if we could take
Moore to be saying that, for goodness to be intrinsic, it must be conceivable for it to belong to a state of affairs even had there never been, were not now, and never would be any human beings to evaluate the state of affairs. Moore would then be adopting the view that goodness is something of which one can become aware, but which exists quite independently of one's awareness of it in the state of affairs which is good. However, in fact, it seems clear from Moore's way of expressing himself, his talk of 'considering what value we should attach' to something in isolation, that the issue for him is simply whether, within the context of evaluation, there is anything we take to be good, whose goodness is not derived from its relation to something else; whether there is anything whose existence we would value, whether or not human beings benefited from it. And this is not very satisfactory. Since if goodness in a state of affairs is in some sense a function of the human activity of evaluating, it surely then is a relational property, and therefore, according to Moore, not intrinsic.

The second place where Moore essays an explication of intrinsic is in the paper The Conception of Intrinsic Value in Philosophical Studies. I shall have occasion to speak of this more at length when I discuss Moore's distinction between natural and non-natural properties, but it is necessary to notice it a little at this point. He says in this essay that,

"To say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question."

In so far as Moore's earlier attempt to elucidate 'intrinsic' retains the ambiguous elements I mentioned this looks like an improvement. For if whether something is good depends solely on the thing's intrinsic nature, then goodness cannot be a function of human evaluation, since it
cannot be part of a thing's intrinsic nature that it is valued by somebody. All the same, there are difficulties in this definition which should be noted. The main one concerns the phrase 'intrinsic nature'. How are we to understand it? To know that, as ordinarily used, the phrase, 'a thing's intrinsic nature', would not be taken to include properties such as 'being valued by somebody', is not necessarily to have any very precise insight into its positive meaning. Are we to say that a thing's intrinsic nature is that which it is in virtue of its intrinsic, as opposed to its relational, properties? But then, as Moore himself saw, we are in a new difficulty, because the sense in which such properties are intrinsic and the way in which they are related to the intrinsic nature of the thing are different from the sense in which goodness is intrinsic and from the way in which a thing's goodness is related to its intrinsic nature.

"It seems to me one of the most important truths about predicates of value, that though many of them are intrinsic kinds of value, in the sense I have defined, yet none of them are intrinsic properties, in the sense in which such properties as 'yellow' or the property of 'being a state of pleasure' or 'being a state of things which contains a balance of pleasure' are intrinsic properties."

The trouble with all this is that, in order to understand what 'intrinsic' means when applied to goodness, you have first of all to understand what 'intrinsic' means when applied, say, to yellow. And this is what Moore, at the end of his essay, confesses himself unable to explain.

The third account of what it means to call goodness intrinsic is to be found in *Is Goodness a Quality?*:

"Suppose we say: I use the phrase 'intrinsically good' to mean precisely the same as 'worth having for its own sake'; and I use the expression "Good", in this usage, stands for an intrinsic character' to mean precisely the same as "Good", in this usage means the same as "worth having for its own sake". It seems to me that, if we say this, we have given a clear explanation of how
we use 'intrinsically good', and also of how we use 'Good', in this usage, stands for an intrinsic character.'

Now to the extent that 'intrinsically good' means 'worth having for its own sake', I am inclined to say that the word 'good' in the phrase 'intrinsically good' means 'worth having', and that therefore it is the words 'for its own sake' which explain 'intrinsically'. But there is an ambiguity in expressions involving the words 'for its own sake' which parallels that which we encountered in Moore's first attempt at elucidation. To say that something is worth having for its own sake may be to deny that it is worth having only as a means to something else; which is the same thing as to say that it is 'good in itself' and not only 'good as a means'. But to say that something is worth having for its own sake may be to deny also that it is worth having only because the individual is interested in it, that its having the character of 'being worth having' depends on the existence of certain prior interests in human beings. But Moore fails to make clear which of these interpretations he has in mind.

I have been considering Moore's different attempts to elucidate the notion of 'intrinsic' as applied to goodness, and my conclusion is that he never managed to elucidate it satisfactorily. But why this is so is an interesting question. For a clear sense could be given to the claim that goodness is intrinsic, if he were prepared to argue that the question of whether something is good is independent of whether human beings have, do, or will exist, and that the question of whether something is worth having is independent of whether anyone has, does, or will have certain interests. A clear sense could be given to it — but would it be true that goodness is intrinsic, is a property, in this sense? Would Moore think so? To answer this question we must look at that part of Moore's thinking which stresses the unlikeness of goodness
to other properties.

The difference between goodness and what would uncontroversially be called properties, Moore expressed by saying that, whereas the latter are natural properties, goodness is non-natural. Now in so far as non-natural property means simply 'property in a special sense', it is not very illuminating. What we need to know is something about what distinguishes goodness and other non-natural properties from natural properties. And here we must face the fact that this distinction Moore himself admitted he had never been able to work out to his satisfaction. It is, however, possible to clear a misconception up straightaway. It might be supposed that non-natural properties were simply not natural ones, so that, if you could first of all define natural properties, you could go on to define non-natural properties negatively, as those properties which do not have the features which make a property natural. But this you cannot do, because non-natural properties, while contrasted with natural properties, are also contrasted with metaphysical properties, which are also not natural.

In *Principia* Moore makes an important remark about goodness: that to say of something that it is good is to say something which is not equivalent to any statement that something is the case. Whereas, to say of something that it has some natural property is to make a statement which is equivalent to a statement that something is the case.

"Any truth which asserts 'This is good in itself' is quite unique in kind .... it cannot be reduced to any assertion about reality, and therefore must remain unaffected by any conclusions we may reach about the nature of reality." 

This is puzzling, for the reason that, if goodness is a property, then, in saying that something is good, you are surely saying that it is the case that it has the property of goodness. But in this context the phrase 'is the case' means simply 'is true', and Moore certainly wants
to hold that, in using sentences containing the word 'good', you are saying something which is true or false. What he seems to have in mind is rather that in saying that something is good, you are not saying that anything exists, and, in that sense, not saying that anything is the case. In other words, no statement to the effect that something is good is equivalent to or entails any statement to the effect that something exists. Consequently, no discovery that something exists or does not exist can have any bearing on the question whether that thing or anything else is good.

But does this take us very far? One may be quite prepared to admit that the question of what is good is quite independent of the question of what exists, and that the sentence, "This is good" does not necessarily imply, "This exists", or indeed any other existential sentence. On the other hand, sentences attributing natural properties look similar in this respect. A geometer is able to say that an equilateral triangle has its internal angles equal, without thereby implying that equilateral triangles, or anything else, exists. His statement is therefore not equivalent to any statement that anything exists. Yet 'having its internal angles equal' is indubitably a natural property, not a non-natural one. It may be true, of course, that there are natural properties such that statements to the effect, "X has this property", will not be held to be true unless the statement, "X exists", is also true. 'Growls' in the sentence, "A tame tiger growls", might be a property of this sort. No one is likely to hold that the sentence, "A tame tiger growls", expresses a true statement, unless there is or has been at least one tame tiger. But it is certainly not true that all natural properties are like 'growls' in this respect. And for that reason Moore's suggestion that statements involving the property of
goodness are independent of statements about what exists, is of no real service in distinguishing natural properties from non-natural. In the Reply, indeed, Moore explicitly disassociated himself from his earlier account of non-natural properties as being those which do not entail existence. 28

In Philosophical Studies there is a renewed attempt to explain in what way natural properties and non-natural ones differ from one another:

"Intrinsic properties seem to describe the intrinsic nature of what possesses them in a sense in which predicates of value never do. If you could enumerate all the intrinsic properties a given thing possessed, you would have given a complete description of it, and would not need to mention any predicates of value it possessed; whereas no description of a given thing could be complete which omitted any intrinsic property." 29

The 'intrinsic properties' Moore refers to in this passage are the natural properties he refers to elsewhere. Later on, Moore came to think of this passage as inaccurate in point of detail, because there might be certain intrinsic, or natural, properties which would not have to be explicitly mentioned in a complete description of some object; that is to say, properties which are entailed by natural properties which are explicitly mentioned. Thus, if you mentioned that a pillar-box was red, you would not have to mention also that it was coloured. Nevertheless, he was disposed to retain the point that in attributing goodness to something you are not describing it. Goodness, for Moore, is never part of the description of a thing. And this point, taken together with the other main point made in the same essay, that the goodness of a thing depends on its intrinsic nature, defines his characteristic stance on the topic of goodness. In other words, Moore wants to say that, although a property such as goodness is an intrinsic property in the sense of a property depending on the intrinsic nature
of the thing which is good, yet it stands, as it were, over against the intrinsic nature without forming any part of it. And this recalls certain remarks, obscure enough in their context, in Principia. There, speaking of natural properties, he says:

"They are, in fact, rather parts of which the object is made up than mere predicates which attach to it. If they were all taken away, no object would be left, not even a bare substance: for they are in themselves substantial and give to the object all the substance that it has. But this is not so with good." 30

And further on he says:

"It is immediately obvious that when we see a thing to be good, its goodness is not a property which we can take up in our hands, or separate from it even by the most delicate scientific instruments. It is not, in fact, like most of the predicates which we ascribe to things, a part of the thing to which we ascribe it." 31

Moore subsequently came to regard these statements as seriously deficient, but I should all the same like to extract the gist of what, it seems to me, Moore is saying in Principia, for the reason that it does anticipate in substance, if not in expression, his later ideas. First of all, he seems to be saying that goodness in a thing is not part of that thing's nature; it adds nothing to what it is. Secondly, and this is the converse of the first point, goodness is a predicate which is always only attached to a thing, which is of such a kind that it always stands over against the thing which is good. Lastly, goodness is never simply joined to or detached from that which is good. With natural properties of all sorts one can conceive that only the one property be altered or removed while all the others stay the same. For example, you can alter a thing's size, or shape, or colour without altering anything else about it. Whereas it is not possible that something which is good should cease to be good, or cease to be good in a certain degree, unless there is a change in other properties of the thing. Now these are, it seems to me, exactly the points that are
being made in Philosophical Studies. By saying that goodness is intrinsic, Moore is insisting that things with the same intrinsic nature cannot differ in their goodness. And by saying that goodness, although intrinsic, is not an intrinsic property, he is saying the goodness of a thing stands outside the thing itself and is not a constituent of the thing's nature. And this point, as I see it, is not substantially different from the point that non-natural properties do not have to be included in a full description of a thing, and that in ascribing them to a thing one is not describing the thing at all, whereas in ascribing natural properties one is describing the thing.

In the 1942 Reply to my Critics we have Moore's final attempt to clarify the distinction between natural and non-natural properties. He here revives the point made in Philosophical Studies that in using a non-natural predicate of something you are not describing it, in the sense in which you are describing it when you use natural predicates of it.

"Properties which are intrinsic properties, but not natural ones, are distinguished from natural intrinsic properties, by the fact that, in ascribing a property of the former kind to a thing, you are not describing it at all, whereas in ascribing a property of the latter kind to a thing, you are always describing it to some extent." 32

Now this does seem to take us a little way towards understanding the distinction, but not very far, as Moore himself acknowledged. For he admitted that, with regard to the distinction, "to make it clear it would be necessary to specify the sense of 'describe' in question; and I am no more able to do this now (in 1942) than I was then (at the time of writing Philosophical Studies)." 33 The matter, therefore, rests at this point: that natural properties describe the object which has them and non-natural properties, such as goodness, do not. And cannot one see the original claim in Principia, that non-natural properties,
unlike natural ones, are not parts of that to which they belong, as something which, although misleadingly expressed, is equivalent to the claim that they do not describe the object which has them in the way that natural properties do?

There is then in Moore's moral philosophy a failure to get clear what it means to say of goodness that it is intrinsic, and what it means to say of goodness that it is non-natural. And these failures, I should argue, are connected. For the attempt to show that goodness is intrinsic belongs to that side of Moore's thinking which stresses the respects in which goodness is like a property; and it is countered by that other side of his thinking which sees the differences between goodness and properties in the normal sense. Similarly the attempt to show that goodness is non-natural is countered by the side of Moore's thinking that seeks to stress the resemblance between goodness and other properties. Now I myself do not see that there can be a property of the sort Moore wants to describe, one which shares with the constitutive properties of a thing the characteristic of being non-relational, of being independent of the existence of anything other than the good thing, and yet which is non-constitutive, not part of the nature of the thing in question. For if we do assert seriously the independence of goodness of the existence of anything other than the thing which is good, I do not know on what grounds you would assert that it is not part of thing's intrinsic nature. It cannot simply be on the grounds that goodness is a derivative property, since Moore notes that certain derivative properties are natural. It seems to me that goodness has this in common with relational properties, that, just as it must be possible to complete one's account of what it is which stands in a certain relation without mentioning the relation, so it must be possible
to complete one's account of what it is which is good without mentioning goodness. But is goodness then a relational property? Moore's isolation argument still has, I think, a certain potency. It does seem to me that thinking of something as being good, in the appropriate sense of the word 'good', does involve thinking that the thing would be good, even if I were not there (and, indeed, even if nobody were there) to think that it is good. What I am less sure about is whether my thinking this is a matter of thinking that goodness is a property, in the way in which 'yellow' and 'sticky' are properties. What makes me hesitate is that I cannot see how, if goodness is a property, it can be said to stand over against the nature of the thing which is good, which I also want to say. And perhaps the solution is that goodness is not subjective, and not relational, and not a property, just as existence is not subjective, and not relational, and not a property. In which case Moore, in treating goodness as a property, will have made an analogous mistake to those who have treated existence as a property. I am not concerned to develop this suggestion at any greater length for the time being. We shall meet it again, and much more tightly integrated into the overall pattern of ethical analysis, in the writings of the philosopher we have next to consider: Nicolai Hartmann.

Before that, however, something remains to be said about why the failure to work out the stronger thesis should have repercussions on Moore's weaker thesis. If the point is accepted that the claim that goodness is intrinsic cannot be reconciled with the fact that the goodness of a thing always stands outside its intrinsic nature, and if Moore's point against the subjectivists is accepted that goodness is a property in the sense that the word 'good' means the same when used at different times and by different persons, then the 'emotive theory'
presents itself as a way of reconciling the two. For then the claim that the meaning of 'good' remains the same under whatever circumstances will be taken care of by the emotive theory, in so far as 'good', according to the theory, always has the same 'emotive' meaning. And the claim that goodness stands outside the nature of the thing which is good will be explained by the theory also, since in saying of something that it is good I will not be describing the thing in question. The emotive theory is therefore, from the point of view of Moore's moral philosophy, an intelligible, even a logical, development from certain of his major themes, and this explains, what is otherwise so surprising, his willingness in the *Reply* to accept it as a possible alternative to his original views.

N. Hartmann

In moving from the ethical writings of G.E. Moore to the *Ethics* of Nicolai Hartmann, I see myself as moving from a less adequate moral philosophy to one which, for all its sprawling manner of presentation and recurrent obscurity, seems to me more adequate in the respects which are essential. In common with Moore, Hartmann attempts to elucidate moral questions by means of an interrogation of moral experience. But what in Moore's writings appears rigorously refined, to the point of losing its moral flavour altogether, in Hartmann exhibits a much greater degree of concreteness. I should like to consider respects in which this works to Hartmann's advantage.

It is hard to read *Principia Ethica*, for example, and not be struck by how rarified the atmosphere is in which moral matters are discussed. Of the ordinary concerns of moral agents (Is this action just? Is it honest? Is it in keeping with the undertakings I have given?) there is barely a mention. Instead you are invited to accept, as the
paradigm of moral thinking, thinking given to answering questions like, what things are the best of the things which are good in themselves? and, what are the means by which they can be brought into existence? And one gets no hint of there being moral problems which cannot be resolved along these lines. Moore's conception of moral experience is correspondingly austere. It admits ultimately of two and only two possibilities: the experience of something as being good (or bad) in itself, and the experience of something as being better (or worse) than something else. Everything else (for instance, the experience of being obliged to perform some action) reduces for Moore to an experience of this kind plus the holding of certain other non-moral beliefs (for instance, that only that action would in fact have the consequences which I apprehend to be the best).

There are doubtless a number of objections which one could bring against this account, considered as an account of the whole of moral experience, but there is only one that I want to press here. It is that it ignores the experience we sometimes have of two things, both of which are good, being good in different ways. Thus, for example, it is much clearer to me that the goodness which there is in the existence of a Michelangelo pieta is a different kind of goodness from the goodness of a refugee having a roof to sleep under, than that one is better than the other. Of course, it would be a difficult matter to state in what this difference consists, and perhaps impossible, except we say, uninformatively, that the one's goodness is the goodness which belongs to things of that kind, and the other's goodness the goodness which belongs to things of the other kind. But that we cannot find other terms in which to express the difference in particular cases, does not mean that it is not a difference of the sort I am claiming. And if it
is, then Moore's account of moral experience, which allows only for differences in degree of goodness, must be at fault. It is true that Moore partially allows for differences in kind in the distinction he draws between intrinsic goodness and goodness as a means, but (a) he does not carry this far enough, and (b) the account he gives of 'being good as a means' shows that he is not thinking of it as a distinct kind of goodness, but only as a kind of relation which a thing can have to intrinsic goodness.

That things can vary in the kind of goodness they possess, and not only in the amount of goodness, is tacitly acknowledged by Hartmann in his use of the plural term 'values' (Werte). Thus he speaks of utility as a value, courage as a value, charity as a value, and so on. It might be thought, at first glance, that this is a mere manner of speaking on his part, and that in saying, for example, that courage is a value, Hartmann means no more than that particular acts of courage are valuable, or have value, when they occur. However, while Hartmann would no doubt agree that it did follow from what he said that particular acts of courage are valuable, I do not think that he would agree that that was all he was saying. For an act of courage, on his view, is not just valuable. Whenever such an act occurs it manifests a special kind of valuableness, which is peculiar to that sort of act and which is quite different from the kind of valuableness attaching to, let us say, an act of charity. I have already argued that this does in general terms reflect our way of looking at value or goodness. Whether or not the detailed taxonomy of values, which Hartmann goes on to develop, equally reflects our moral ideas is a question much more debateable, but not one, I think, which is particularly relevant to ethics. I am content here simply to make a plea for the greater adequacy of 'values', as against
goodness, for the analysis of moral experience.

Hartmann's use of the notion of different values gives him the advantage of Moore in other respects also. For instance, it enables him to do justice to the complexity that sometimes enshrouds the taking of a moral decision. What I mean is this. From a reading of Moore's writings one would suppose that there could be no more involved problem for a moral agent than to decide which of two courses of action will have the better consequences, i.e. the consequences with the more goodness. And this seems to me an unsatisfactory account of at least some of our moral problems. I say so not on the grounds that moral problems are more difficult than Moore's account would allow for. For it might be that to form comparative assessments of goodness is, in certain cases, very difficult. My point is rather that, even if it is difficult to decide where the greater amount of goodness lies, still that problem is not complex, in the sense of involving a wide range of different issues. And it is precisely in this sense that I want to insist that some moral problems are complex. Hartmann, who recognises radically different kinds of value and who implies, what is more, their incommensurability one with another, can more easily come to grips with cases of this type. For it follows from these views of his that moral thinking is characteristically an attempt to weigh up alternative courses of action, not by reference to some unitary scale of value, but simultaneously by reference to a number of quite different scales of value. And there is nothing to wonder at in moral thinking sometimes appearing to us to be what, for Hartmann, it characteristically is.

Hartmann says of values that they are essences (Wesenheiten), and this is the second of his terms which calls for explanation. What does he mean by saying that values are essences? What light does his
use of the term throw on the nature of the inquiry into values which
Hartmann is conducting and, in particular, on his claim, in the Foreword
to *Ethics*, to be pursuing an analysis of the contents of values? 35
Finally, what comparisons can we draw between Hartmann’s method of
inquiry and that of Moore in *Principia* and elsewhere?

Hartmann’s explanation of ‘essence’ in *Ethics* leaves a lot to be
desired. One is in the end obliged to frame an account for oneself, by
piecing together remarks scattered here and there, by observing the term
in use, and so on. I myself have drawn also on the account of essence
given by Max Scheler in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale
Wertethik*, 36 to which Hartmann frequently expresses his indebtedness.

Essence, crudely speaking, is that which remains from our
experience of the world, or from our judgements about the world, when we
suspend belief in the existence of anything which corresponds to that
experience or those judgements; and suspend belief also in the exist-
ence of a subject which is the ‘owner’ of the experience or of the
judgements in question. One can best get an idea of what this means
from an example. When I see a red rose in the garden or say to myself,
“That rose is a beautiful shade of red”, the redness of the rose, which
catches my attention, can be regarded in a number of different lights.
It can be regarded in the light of the colour of some actually existing
rose, namely the one I am looking at. As such, I may be mistaken about
it. For the rose may not really be the colour I think it to be, or,
indeed, the rose I think I am seeing may not exist at all.
Alternatively, the redness of the rose can be regarded in the light of
an idea actually present in somebody’s consciousness, namely my own.
Even in this case the possibility of mistake remains. For it may be
that the idea of redness is not in fact present to my consciousness, or
that there is in existence no person answering to the description I
would give of myself. But the redness of the rose can be regarded in
a still different light, in its purely qualitative aspect, as a
definite appraisable content floating free, as it were, from the objects
to which it could be assigned. Only in this last case is one regarding
the redness of the rose as an essence. And to say that something is an
essence is to say no more than that it admits of being regarded in this
way.

How does all this apply to values? Take purity as an example.
We speak of the life of some person as being pure, treating purity, so
to speak, as a property of his life, i.e. as a property or character
which in fact his thoughts and actions taken as a whole possess. This
actual presence of values in things Hartmann calls ethical existence.
And he denies that he is interested in values from this point of view.
Values have ethical existence also in consciousness in so far as one or
other of them forms the actual subject of someone's thoughts. Hartmann
acknowledges this as important, but he argues that, while ethical
investigation must start from such values as are in fact present to one's
consciousness, it must then immediately proceed to the consideration of
them, no longer as ingredients of any empirical consciousness, and
purely qualitatively. In other words, as essences. "Our philosophical
survey," he says, "Does not take its ideal objects for ethical phenomena
given in the realm of fact, but, after turning attention to facts, it
beholds its objects immediately and independently of facts." Let us
note, as a supplement to this, that Hartmann does not think that our
insight into values is restricted either in its scope or in its degree
of articulateness to what is given by the primary consciousness of value.
The latter is, on the one hand, the jumping off point for the
investigation of values, and, on the other, the final court of appeal in value inquiry. But within these limits ample room remains to pursue a purely essential or phenomenological investigation of values, all the more effective for being divorced from practical concerns and investigations of fact. Volume Two of the Ethics is devoted to an investigation of this kind.

It is one thing to grasp the sense in which Hartmann is interested in values and the kind of inquiry this involves, and another thing perhaps to grasp the general significance of his argument. It seems to me that, in drawing attention to essences, Hartmann is making a case for there being knowledge which is not knowledge of things, in the sense of existing things, but is knowledge simply of the 'whatness' of things, which does not take the existence of the putative 'things' for granted. That is to say, he is suggesting that there is or can be knowledge of what something is, which is independent of our knowing whether it is. And his claim that values are essences amounts to the claim that the different kinds of values admit of being known in this way, i.e. independently of our knowing whether anything corresponds to them, or any facts whatsoever about existence. He is therefore making a point similar to Moore's, where the latter says that questions of goodness cannot be reduced to questions of what is real, and must remain unaffected by the conclusions we reach about the nature of reality. Only for Hartmann this is not a peculiarity of values, but is something shared with essences of all kinds.

Now a question arises about the relationship which there is between Hartmann's kind of ethical investigation and the kind of inquiries pursued by Moore. And it is easy to suppose, on the evidence of Moore using such expressions as 'property' and 'characteristic', and even
'idea' and 'notion', that his is an investigation into what Hartmann would call ethical existence, i.e., into reality in so far as it is good. But, when we reflect a little, we can see that this is not so. Moore makes it perfectly clear at the very outset of Principia that he is not engaged in an empirical inquiry into the things which actually are good.39 And it would be equally misleading to suppose that, because he uses expressions such as 'idea' or 'notion', he is engaged in an introspective survey of his own moral consciousness. Rather he is interested in consciousness, as Hartmann is, only in the sense of being interested in what it is a consciousness of: "that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word (good) is generally used to stand for".40 The most that can be said against Moore is that he is less explicit than Hartmann about the distinction between treating an idea as something actually present in consciousness and treating it vis-à-vis its content, as an ideal phenomenon. There is no evidence that it led him into confusion in his thinking. Furthermore, what Hartmann is arguing against, in urging this distinction, is the tendency of certain philosophers to reason from the fact that an idea is in one's consciousness to a conclusion that there exists, in fact, something outside of consciousness; in the way that Descartes is sometimes thought to have used the presence in consciousness of the idea of a perfect being, as evidence for that being's existence. Now there is certainly no sign in Moore's writings of his attempting to derive existential judgements about goodness or anything else from the presence of the idea of 'good' in consciousness. He tends, on the contrary, to make a clear divide between moral judgements (those involving goodness) and judgements about existence.

Yet there is a further distinction which Hartmann's treatment of
values allows us to make, which one can guess that Moore did not notice, and this time at the cost of confusion. I have explained how Hartmann's method involves a kind of phenomenological reduction performed with regard to the values which are present in consciousness, and the consequent consideration of them in the light of ideal contents. The distinction I have in mind is between statements that are made from within the reduction and presuppose it, which express one's intuiting of the values in their character as essences (these would include descriptions of individual values and statements about their relation one to another), and, the second group, statements made about the reduction from the point of view of someone setting out to describe what it involves. The first sort of judgements seem to me value judgements pure and simple; the second sort, to the extent that they refer to values, philosophical judgements about value. Thus, for example, Hartmann's claim that moral values are 'higher' (in the sense that they evoke reverence, and not merely desire) than non-moral values, is a value judgement, made from within the reduction. His claim that values are genuine objects of knowledge, on the other hand, seems to me rather a philosophical judgement, referring to the epistemological status of values. It is important to emphasise this distinction because the different sorts of judgements have to be argued for or tested in different ways. The first have the character of reports, and we can assess their accuracy only by ourselves conducting the same experiments in valuation to see whether we come up with the same results. In other words, only by engaging in valuational or moral thinking. In the case of the other, philosophical, judgements, they must be assessed and criticised like any other such judgements. And this requires not moral, but philosophical, thinking.
It would be going too far to say that Hartmann makes explicit use of this distinction, but there is an implicit acknowledgment of it in the divisions of his book. Generally speaking, Volume One of *Ethics* is concerned with the working out of a philosophical theory of value, which is of first importance for ethics; whereas Volume Two deals mainly with value theory, the attempt to examine values individually and in terms of such principles of order as can be discerned among them. The importance of the latter is for morality. I think it is true that, because Moore lacks the concept of the reduction, he lacks also any sense of this distinction between judgements in value theory and judgements in the philosophical theory of value. His claims about goodness, that it is simple, unanalysable, unique, belong clearly enough to value theory, in the sense in which I have been using the term. I say this because the arguments invoked in support of these claims (e.g., the so-called 'open question' argument), if looked at closely, can be seen to amount to little more than invitations to carry out certain experiments in 'visualising' goodness. We are then supposed just to 'see' that goodness is not something complex, or not equivalent to anything else. This explains the high ratio of assertion to argument for which *Principia*, in particular, is remarkable. On the other hand, the claim that goodness is a property seems to me to belong, together with the supporting arguments, to the philosophical theory of value. And it is this core of pure philosophical inquiry into value that I have tried to lay bare in my discussion of Moore's views.

I want finally to reexamine Moore's claim, that goodness is a property, from the perspective of Hartmann's philosophy. In order to do so, it is, of course, necessary to make adjustments. Where Moore speaks of goodness or of intrinsic value, Hartmann speaks in the plural
of values; and I have already suggested why I think this to be an improvement. Moore's question, therefore, appears for Hartmann as a question about values.

But from Hartmann's point of view, Moore's question, is goodness a property? is ambiguous. It could mean, to take the first alternative, are values, regarded simply as essences, properties or something analogous to properties? Or it could mean, are values, in their specific character as values (i.e. qua valuable), properties or something analogous to properties? Take the first question. It is equivalent to the question, is an essence a property? I think that it is clear, however, that an essence is not a property. We do, it is true, use words like 'redness' and 'courage' to denote properties, and we use the same words to denote essences, but this does not show properties and essences to be the same thing. What is more significant is that we speak of things as having properties, whereas Hartmann, I am sure, would be loth to speak of things as having the corresponding essences. Essences cannot belong to things in the sense in which properties do. That is why we cannot distinguish them, as we do properties, by reference to that of which they are the essences. Thus, for example, the pillar-box's property of being red is not identical with my pen's property of being red, even though they are the same colour and, to that extent, manifest the same essence. Again, properties exist, in the things of which they are the properties, whereas it does not make sense to say of essences that they exist or do not exist, but only that there exist or do not exist things which correspond to them. For these reasons it would seem incorrect to say that essences are the same as properties. We might, however, want to say that there is some kind of analogy between essences and properties,
in that things correspond to essences in virtue of, and solely in virtue of, possessing properties. Indeed, to say that something corresponds to the essence 'redness' for example, it may be held is only a way of saying that it has the property of being red, and vice versa. It is certainly not just an accident that essences and properties make use of the same name. So that, with regard to the first question, we might answer that essences are not properties in the strict sense of the word, but that nevertheless there are connections between the terms 'essence' and 'property' which makes it reasonable to say that the former is analogous to the latter. And in that sense values are analogous to properties.

But if the question is, are values, in their character as valuable, properties or something analogous to properties? Is their valuableness a property? then Hartmann's answer would seem to be "No". For what makes a value a value, and not any other kind of essence, is not some common element of content, but something that stands outside its content. For to be a value is not just to be a content which may or may not be realised in things; it is to be a content which ought to be so realised. Hartmann speaks of this ought-to-beness (Seinsollen) of values as their specific mode of being, and he is at pains to distinguish it from the general essence of value:

"The ideal Ought-to-Be is the mode of being of value, its proper modality, which is never lost in the structure of the matter. But the value is the content of the Ought; it is the categorial structure, the existential mode of which is that of the ideal Ought-to-Be."1

His distinction is, I think, an interesting one and it is worth mentioning the sort of considerations which appear to have influenced him in making it. The chief one seems to have been that, if the ought-to-
beness of values is absorbed into the general essence of value, then we have an enhancement of content, but at the cost of values' relevance to practice; "all properly practical, actual significance would be stripped from them". Thinking of values would become no longer practical thinking, but theoretical thinking about a special class of essences. (Here we have a criticism which is very akin to those levelled at moral philosophers such as Moore, Ross and Prichard. E.g. Nowell-Smith’s remarks in Ethics, Ch. 3) There is a second, related point, which is that whatever belongs to essence can be manifested in things. If the ought-to-beness of values is their general essence, therefore, then it should follow that things could manifest ought-to-beness. In other words, that things should, while remaining things, become values. And this clearly is impossible. Things are. Only values ought to be. Though you can say that things are as they ought to be, that is to say, in so far as they correspond to some value.

It can be seen, therefore, that Hartmann explains the ought-to-beness of values in terms which I earlier suggested Moore might have used in explaining goodness, that is as something analogous to existence. In this way he is able to avoid the difficulties encountered by Moore in claiming that goodness is a property, and at the same time able to preserve, as English-speaking intuitionists did not always seem to do, the practical character of moral judgement. But, with regard to Moore, he does something else also. For Hartmann has detected in the question, is goodness a property? two problems, to one of which the correct answer would be a qualified "Yes", and to the other of which the correct answer would be "No". And this goes some way towards explaining Moore’s ambivalence on this topic.
So what is Hartmann's answer to the question with which we began, what are we saying when we say that a state of affairs is good, or that some action is right or a duty? It would be an explanation, not in terms of some one property, which could be intuited in the state of affairs or action, but in terms of values, i.e., in terms of a number of qualitatively different contents whose mode of being is that they are principles for reality, while at the same time not necessarily being principles of reality.

Summing up, then, the respects in which Hartmann's account of moral experience has the advantage over Moore's, I should single out three things. First, it analyses moral experience in a much more concrete manner and thus, it seems to me, it gets much closer to what the ordinary person would recognise to be his moral experience. Secondly, whether Hartmann intended this or not, it does, I think, sharpen the distinction between what I called value theory and the philosophical theory of value, which is blurred in Moore's writings. Thirdly, it provides an explanation of, as well as a means of escaping from, Moore's difficulties regarding whether goodness is a property, thereby showing them not to be inherent in the notion of moral experience as such; while Hartmann's modal treatment of ought-to-beness goes a long way towards explaining how our experience of values can have significance for practice. With these points in his favour, Hartmann seems to me to come closer than any other moral philosopher to vindicating the analysis of moral experience as an approach to the understanding of morality as a whole.
References

1. The Methods of Ethics, p. v
2. " " " p. 14
3. " " " p. 14
4. Principia Ethica, p. viii
5. " " p. viii
6. " " all these quotations p. 6
7. " " p. 15
8. " " p. 10
9. The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, p. 554
10. Principia Ethica, p. 14
11. Philosophical Studies, p. 254
12. The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, pp. 545-7
13. " " " pp. 547-51
14. Ethics, p. 51
15. The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, p. 552
16. Principia Ethica, p. 21
17. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (Supplementary Volume) 1932, p. 126
18. Ethics, p. 32
19. Principia Ethica, p. 91
20. " " pp. 83-4
21. " " p. 84
22. cf., for example, P.H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics, p. 74
23. Philosophical Studies, p. 260
24. " " p. 272
25. " " pp. 274-5
26. Philosophical Papers, pp. 94-5
27. Principia Ethica, p. 114
29. Philosophical Studies, p. 274
30. Principia Ethica, p. 41
31. " " p. 124
32. The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, p. 591
33. " " " " p. 591
34. " " " " pp. 587-90
35. Hartmann's Ethics, Vol. I, p. 15
36. pp. 67-99 are particularly useful in this regard.
38. Principia Ethica, p. 114
39. " " p. 3
40. " " p. 6
41. Hartmann's Ethics, Vol. I, p. 245
42. " " Vol. I, p. 236
Most recent commentators have represented H.A. Prichard as the intuitionist par excellence, the most sublime, because the most intransigent, of all those who have analysed morality in terms of moral experience. Thus Professor Howell-Smith in his *Ethics* states that, "Prichard represents the intuitionist thesis in its clearest and most uncompromising form"; a judgement echoed in Mary Warnock's *Ethics since 1900*. That being so, my reason for wishing to discuss Prichard at this point may seem deliberately perverse. For I would like to discuss him as the philosopher who, with his eye for a difficulty and disdain for his own intellectual comfort, intimated (and, in one area at least, partly articulated) the most far-reaching criticism of the intuitionist position. It is criticism, moreover, which I take to be applicable also to many of the theories of ethics which are in favour today.

There is, so it seems to me, a line of development which can be traced in Prichard's contributions to ethics. It begins in his 1912 *Mind* article *Does Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake?*, in which he criticises the utilitarian brand of intuitionism proper to Sidgwick and G.E. Moore, in favour, as it appears, of a deontological intuitionism of his own; the thread is taken up again, but at a different point, in his 1932 British Academy Lecture *Duty and Ignorance of Fact*, one conclusion of which is that to state that someone has a duty to do something is to state a fact about the person, not about the action; and the final point is reached, unless I am mistaken, in a correcting note appended to this same lecture in the book *Moral Obligation*, the 1949
collection of his ethical writings.

Let me go over the ground in more detail. In the early article we find Prichard denying that an explanation of why we ought to perform some action can be given in terms either of the intrinsic goodness of the action, or of the intrinsic goodness of the state of affairs which the action will bring about. His objections to the former need not detain us long. There are only two sorts of actions which we ever regard as being intrinsically good: those which we perform from a sense of duty, i.e. from the sense that we ought to perform them, and those which we perform under the influence of some virtuous desire such as gratitude or benevolence. Suppose it is the first. Then instead of our sense that we ought to perform the action arising from our sense that it is intrinsically good, our sense of it as intrinsically good must depend on our sense that we ought to perform it. If, on the other hand, the intrinsically good action is one performed solely from a virtuous desire, then it is impossible to infer from that that we ought to do it, since it is of the essence of an intrinsically good action, so understood, that it is performed, not from duty, but from some virtuous desire.\(^3\)

However, the centre of interest for me lies in the objections which he offers to explaining one's obligations in terms of the goodness of situations. It cannot be, he contends, that, from the premises 'Action x will bring about situation y' and 'Situation y is intrinsically good', we can derive the conclusion, 'Therefore I ought to do x'. We need to insert some additional premise, viz. that that which is intrinsically good ought to be. And this new premise, according to Prichard, is simply not true, or at least not true in every case. What he has in mind is, I think, that 'ought' belongs to the idiom of
commitment, whereas the statement that something is good may express, in Hume's phrase, only the calm and indolent judgement of the understanding. Let us suppose, however, that, laying aside the notion of intrinsic goodness, we describe the situation as something which ought to be: would it then follow that I ought to do x? Again Prichard brings forward reasons for thinking that it would not. In the first place, the locution 'ought to be' seems slightly suspect. The word 'ought' refers to actions and to actions alone. The proper language is never 'So and so ought to be', but 'I ought to do so and so'. This is a small thing. What is worth noting is the point of substance which lurks behind the linguistic one, namely that 'ought' expresses a requirement, and a requirement can only be for someone to do something, not for a state of affairs to exist. While it may be incumbent on a person to bring about a situation, it cannot be incumbent on the situation to be brought about. In so far as we do use an expression like 'So and so ought to be', therefore, it can only be an oblique way of referring to the fact that someone ought to bring it about. And in that case it cannot be used to explain why he ought to bring it about.

It should be pointed out that the force of this argument is not, despite appearances, to banish the expression 'ought to be'; all that is shown is that it is misleading to apply it to situations or state of affairs. And for the time being, within the compass of that article, Prichard was content to leave it at that. But later on, certainly by the 1930s, he must have begun to realise that he must take the argument a step further. The necessity for this arose out of the fact that one can say of actions that they ought to be, and this seems to provide a premise from which one could conclude that one ought to do them. Or,
more exactly, it provides us with a way by which we can express the fact that we ought to do an action in terms of a characteristic of the action. But that 'Such and such an action ought to be' and 'I ought to do such and such an action' did not mean the same thing, he was convinced. His old argument for dismissing the expression 'ought to be', that 'ought' refers to actions alone, could not be invoked here, since it was precisely actions of which it was being said that they ought to be. His new argument ran somewhat as follows. Only that which exists can have properties or characteristics; being something which ought to exist is a property, just like having red hair and being ten foot tall are properties; therefore only something which already exists can be something which ought to exist. But ex hypothesi the action of which it is being said that it ought to exist is a duty. And a duty can only be to perform an action which does not already exist. It cannot, consequently, be said of an action which it is my duty to perform, that it ought to exist. Here are Prichard's own words:

"For we can no more either think or assert of something which we think does not exist that it ought to exist than we can think or assert anything else about it. Of what we think does not exist we can think and assert nothing at all."

And elsewhere:

"Only something which is can be something which ought, or ought not, to exist. To say, e.g., that a feeling of generosity which I am not having 'ought' to exist is to say nothing, just because ex hypothesi there is nothing here for 'being something which ought to exist' to be attributed to."

But we do, in fact, say of that which does not exist, e.g., public spirit, that it ought to exist. Prichard's explanation of this is that what is apparently a categorical statement about a pattern of behaviour which does not yet exist is really a hypothetical statement about a property which that pattern of behaviour would have if it did
exist. In other words, statements of the type 'X ought to exist' must be construed as meaning 'If x were to exist it would be something which ought to exist'. And yet as Prichard confesses, "We find it hard to convince ourselves that such a statement is not in meaning as well as in grammatical form categorical." What is clear from this is that, if Prichard is right, then there is an important difference between 'X ought to exist' and 'I ought to do x' which might not be suspected at first sight. Whereas the fact that something ought to exist is, so the argument runs, dependent on that something existing, the fact that I ought to do x cannot be dependent in the same way on x being done. It makes nonsense to say that a duty is only a duty if someone performs it, for then it would never be possible to speak of a duty being neglected. And whatever account we give of the sentence 'I ought to do x', it must enable us to make sense of the notion of duty we do have. Prichard concludes:

"Since the existence of an obligation to do some action cannot possibly depend on the actual performance of the action, the obligation cannot itself be a property which the action would have if it were done."

Now the interesting thing about this conclusion is that it shifts the discussion on to a different ground. Prichard's initial contention was that the attribute to which we refer when we say that 'So and so ought to do x' is "sui generis, i.e. unique, and therefore incapable of having its nature expressed in terms of the nature of anything else", but the logic of his argument carries him to a further point. The attribute or property cannot be a property which the action would have if it were done; but no more can it be a property which the action has before it is done, since, before it is done, the action does not exist; and what does not exist cannot, according to Prichard, have properties. In this way Prichard is led to conclude that the attribute in question
is not the attribute of an action. It can only be, he thinks, the attribute of an agent:

"When we make an assertion containing the term 'ought' or 'ought not', that to which we are attributing a certain character is not a certain activity but a certain man."

It is, of course, easy to say that Prichard is mistaken here in supposing that there must be some attribute or property in question, such that, if it cannot belong to the action, it must belong to the person who acts; and that the real solution is to stop thinking of moral obligation in terms of attributes. It may be so. But then I intend to argue that Prichard, by his own route, came to see that it was so. If I spend time going over the reasoning which brought him round to this way of thinking, it is because I think that many of those who have castigated the intuitionists for thinking of moral obligation in terms of attributes have done so unreflectively, and consequently in their own theories of ethics have made a covert return to this position. I shall say more about this in the following chapter.

I should like to examine now in a more critical fashion this argument of Prichard's, that only what exists can have properties, and the conclusion he draws from it. In its complete form it runs like this: only that which exists can have properties; being something which ought to exist is a property; therefore only of that which exists can it be correct to say that it ought to exist; therefore, to carry the matter further, to say of something which does not exist, that it ought to exist, can only be to say that, if it existed, it would be something which ought to exist. My doubts about it concern the initial premise and the conclusion. Take the premise first, that only that which exists can have properties. There is certainly a sense in which this is true. We sometimes use the word 'property' in such a
way that nothing could be said to have, say, the property of redness, unless it both exists and is red. And it was this use of the word that I emphasised when, in discussing Hartmann, I contrasted property with essence. But 'property' if principally, is not exclusively, used with this implication. Geometers find it convenient to speak of the properties of isosceles triangles, and are not thereby supposed to cherish a belief in the existence of such triangles. It might indeed be argued that in speaking of the properties of isosceles triangles, one is speaking of the properties which they would have if they existed. But if we are to be allowed to speak of non-existent things at all, I do not myself see why we cannot refer to them as having properties. I suspect, indeed, that the argument which Prichard employs in this connection, if sound, would be as effective in proving that we cannot refer to that which does not exist. And that would mean our never being able to say that we ought to do an action, since ex hypothesi the action is one which does not exist.

I am not much happier with the conclusion. I am not even sure what sense to make of the statement that, if x existed, it would be something which ought to exist. In form it resembles the sentence 'If x existed, it would be good', and it is perhaps the currency of the latter sentence (in the sense of 'It would be good, if x existed') which disposes us to accept the former as an intelligible statement. But 'It would be good if x existed' does not mean 'X would be good if it existed', but rather 'X's existing would be a good thing'. And I am inclined to interpret 'X ought to exist' in a similar way. That is to say, when a man thinks of something, which does not exist, that it ought to exist, he is thinking that it ought to be that it exists, and is not thinking that, if it existed, it would be something which
ought to exist. It is the more surprising that Prichard should treat 'If x existed, it would be something which ought to exist' as an ordinary conditional, since he showed himself with respect to the analogous sentence, 'I can if I choose', alive to the deceptiveness of grammatical form. To adapt his argument in the latter case, it is impossible to maintain that the goodness of something (the fact that it ought to exist), as distinct from its existence, can depend on whether or not there is such a thing. In saying of some pattern of behaviour that it ought to be, one may perhaps have to avow also that it could exist, but not surely that it exists already, or will exist in the future. Doubt as to whether something ought to be is something quite different from doubt as to whether it will be. And yet it does seem as if; on Prichard's view, one could entertain doubt about whether something ought to be, because one entertains doubt about whether it will ever come to be; just as, in the case of the proposition 'He will become a great poet if he fulfills his promise', one could entertain doubt about his becoming a great poet from doubt as to whether he will fulfill his promise.

There is, however, a valid point to be made here, and it may have been uppermost in Prichard's mind. It is that a situation or action which does not exist cannot impose on anyone an obligation to bring it into existence. Situations and actions cannot in this way fling their shadows before. Something must exist before it can have effects of any kind. To have a duty to do some action is, as we tend to think, to be in a particular situation; but that which brings it about that one is in this situation cannot be something which will only come into existence subsequent to, and perhaps as a result of, the situation thus created. It is in this sense that an explanation of my having a duty
here and now in terms of something which ought to be, but *ex hypothesi* does not yet exist, is impossible. What is being denied here is that you can give a *causal* explanation of my having a duty in terms of something which ought to be; and this contrasts with the earlier denial that you could give an account of the meaning of 'I have a duty to do x' in terms of x being something which ought to be.

Most people at this point would want to object that no one, unless from carelessness, ever maintained that the action to be performed is the cause of our having a duty to perform it. What produces the obligation, they would say, is not the action which one is obliged to perform and which therefore cannot yet exist, it is either the existing situation in which one finds oneself, or it is the thought, which may also exist, that such and such an action is a duty. But which of these are we to say? It is this question that Prichard tries to answer in his lecture *Duty and Ignorance of Fact*. What seems, on first inspection, to be an ingeniously developed treatment of a quite special problem in moral philosophy, is, in fact, of much wider significance for our understanding of the phenomenon of morals in general. He states the problem in the following terms:

"If a man has an obligation, i.e. a duty, to do some action, does the obligation depend on certain characteristics of the situation, or on certain characteristics of his thought about the situation?"  

One's first, largely unreflective, response to this question would be to say that, of course, it depends on certain characteristics of the situation, e.g., that there is somebody in need and I have the means to help him. And, indeed, when we think about it, we can find considerations which point to the same answer. We certainly think that, if a person wants to know whether he has an obligation or not to do something, he should try to discover what the facts of the case are;
the answer, we imply, lies in the facts. And the objective position seems implied also in the idea we have that if we do our duty then we shall have brought about a change for the better in things.

But there is something to be said on the other side too. No matter how meticulously we scrutinise the facts, we can never be sure that they are as we take them to be. It is always possible that our reading of a situation is mistaken in some respect. Thus, for example, I may fail to take seriously a suicide threat which is, in fact, seriously intended. And I can be no more sure that the action which seems to me called for in such a situation is really the best, or the appropriate, response. So, in the case of the prospective suicide, my interference may, in fact, precipitate the very thing it was intended to avert. For these reasons, it looks as if one must conclude that we never can be sure whether that, which seems to be our duty, really is our duty; indeed that we can never be sure whether we, or anyone else, has ever had a duty. Perhaps we have only thought we had. And this does seem hard to accept.

Again, on the view that my having a duty depends on the facts of the situation, it would seem that one could do one's duty, i.e. the action which, as the facts are, is one's duty, even though one is quite unconscious that that is what one is doing. And I wonder whether we ever do speak of a person as having done his duty in those circumstances.

A different sort of objection to the objective view, Prichard brings up also. "The objective view" he says, "is in direct conflict with all the numerous cases in which we think without question that we ought to do something which we are thinking of as of the nature of an insurance in the interest of someone else." He has in mind, for instance, the case where, in driving a car, one thinks that one ought to
slow down before entering another road, because there may be cars on
the other road and to enter it without first slowing down would
endanger other drivers. If we suppose that the obligation to slow
down depends on there being, in fact, other cars on the road, then (a)
we cannot be sure in advance whether we have a duty to slow down; and
(b) if, in the event, we find that there are no other cars, then we will
be able to conclude that, after all, we did not have a duty to slow down.
And the short answer to this is that that is not how we think in such a
situation. \footnote{17}

There is a further point that, although, when someone disagrees
with us about what he ought to do, we try to argue with him and to that
end adduce certain facts to support our own point of view; yet, if in
the end he continues to think differently from us, we cannot but think
him bound to act as he thinks he ought, not as we think he ought. Here
again the subjective view seems implied. "Undoubtedly, then" Prichard
concludes, "The subjective view better corresponds with our ordinary
thought." \footnote{18}

Nevertheless, I do not think that the subjective position is one
that we can hold with any comfort. How can my having an obligation to
do \( x \) depend, not on \( x \) being an action of a certain kind, but on my
thinking \( x \) to be an action of that kind? In the reflection which I give
to discovering my duty, I think \( x \) to be my duty precisely \textbf{because} it is
an action of a certain kind; which implies that, if I am mistaken in
thinking it to be of that kind, then I am also mistaken in thinking it
to be a duty. Our 'ordinary thought' on these matters seems divided
against itself.

Prichard's solution to this problem is to question its underlying
assumption, which is, he says, that, when we speak of some action being
a duty, we are attributing some character to the action. So long as we think of an action's being a duty as a character of the action, it must necessarily depend on what the action is, and not on what it is thought to be; or, to be more exact (since the action does not yet exist), it must depend on what the situation is to which such an action is appropriate, and not on what the situation is thought to be. But it may be that, in saying that an action is a duty, we are attributing a character, not to the action, but to the moral agent, the character, namely, of 'being obliged to do some action'. I have criticised an earlier argument which Prichard offers for making this switch, that only what exists can have characters or properties, and therefore only an action already in existence, one already performed, could have the character of being a duty; whereas a duty can only be to perform an action which has not been performed. However, it could be reasonably argued that, if making the switch from treating duty as the 'character of an action' to treating it as the 'character of an agent' is the only way to escape from the antinomy presented by the objective and subjective views of obligation, then the fact of the antinomy is itself an argument for making the switch. And from that perspective we can view the whole of Prichard's lecture as one elaborate argument whose conclusion is that obligation must, strictly speaking, be thought of as a fact about a moral agent, and not a fact about an action. His summing up of the problem is as follows:

"If our being bound to set ourselves to do some action were a character which the activity would have, its existence would, no doubt, have to depend on the fact that the activity would have a certain character, and it could not depend on our thinking that it would. Yet since, in fact, it is a character of ourselves, there is nothing to prevent its existence depending on our having certain thoughts about the situation and, therefore, about the nature of the activity in respect of its effects."

Prichard appears to reason in the following way. An action's being a duty cannot depend on our thinking that it is a duty, since what we think about an action does not, and cannot, affect it in any way. On the other hand, my thinking that an action is a duty does make a difference to me. The situation of a person who thinks that he ought to do x is different from that of a person who does not think that he ought to do x, and it is the difference in their respective situations which makes it intelligible to say, in the one case, that the man ought to do x, and, in the other, that the man ought not to do x. There is nothing surprising in the fact that one person may have an obligation to perform some action, which another man, in a different situation, does not have an obligation to perform.

This was in 1932 Prichard's solution to the problem of whether we have obligations in virtue of the facts of our situation, or in virtue of our thought about the facts. He is arguing, in effect, that one of the relevant facts of our situation, and the ultimately crucial one, is that we think our situation to be of a certain kind. And so the apparent dilemma between the objective view of obligation and the subjective view is got around. And there, so far as I can discover, all commentators on Prichard have stopped, overlooking the fact that, at some later date, Prichard reexamined his conclusion and acknowledged that it would not do in its existing form. The evidence for these second thoughts is contained in a handful of notes on the lecture jotted down subsequently, and placed by Sir David Ross at the end of the lecture when it was reprinted in Moral Obligation. Certain of the notes, it is true, concern minor inaccuracies of expression, and perhaps it has been generally felt that all are of this type. But this is not true, I am sure, of one paragraph, the significance of
which has not been recognised.

Before I quote the paragraph in question I should like to criticise the 'solution' offered towards the end of *Duty and Ignorance of Fact*. It was, let me recall, to treat my having a duty as a character not of the action, but of myself as a moral agent. Let us suppose we accept this. Surely a problem still remains which is similar to the problem we were originally concerned with? Do I have this character of 'being obliged to do x' in virtue of my situation being of a certain kind, or in virtue of my thinking that the situation is of a certain kind? To say that what I think makes a difference to my situation and can, therefore, bring it about that I have a character I would not otherwise have had, is simply to skate over the difficulty.

This becomes obvious if we consider two points. The first is that, in trying to decide whether I am obliged to do x, I am not content to know that I, in fact, think my situation to be of a certain kind; I want to find out whether I am right to think that my situation is of that kind. But why should this concern me if it is not the facts of the situation which are important, but what I think about the facts? I could save myself a time-consuming investigation of the facts by simply introspecting that I do think them to be of a certain kind. And this brings out, I believe, an ambiguity in the notion of 'my situation'. Prichard argues that the objective and subjective views are not mutually exclusive, in that what I think about the facts forms part of my situation. But 'the facts' here simply means 'my situation', so that he is using the latter expression in two senses, a less inclusive sense in which it does not include what I think, and a more inclusive sense in which it does include what I think about my situation (in the less inclusive sense). Thus the problem is only apparently solved,
since it can still be asked: does my being obliged to do x depend on my situation (in the less inclusive sense), or does it depend on my situation (in the more inclusive sense)? And to say it is the second, I am arguing, is not possible, because it is in contradiction, seeming contradiction anyway, with the frame of mind in which we set about determining for ourselves what our duty is. The question which faces us in morality is always ‘What is my duty?’, and is never ‘What am I thinking is my duty?’.

The second point follows from this. On reflection most of us would admit that, in particular concrete cases, although one may feel very strongly that one’s situation is of a certain kind, one cannot be entirely sure about it. Or, at least in the majority of cases, it is difficult to be sure whether one’s situation is of that kind or not. Now, if it were the case that my thinking my situation to be such that x is my duty entailed that x really is my duty, and if we accept that I rarely am sure what my duty is, then one ought to be able to conclude that I rarely know, or that it is very difficult to know, what I am thinking my situation to be. And that is clearly false. There is usually no difficulty at all in deciding what I think my situation is; the difficulty always lies in deciding whether what I think is correct. Of course, there are cases when I simply do not know what to think. But then it seems clear that a doubt in which no alternative is envisaged (which is the position when I think, but am not entirely certain, that my situation is such and such) is of a different order from a doubt which is entertained not about a particular situation, i.e. where one is hesitating between alternatives or perhaps unable to specify one’s situation in any definite way at all. If we give this and the point made in the previous paragraph due weight, then I think we must say that
what Prichard offers as a solution to the problem of subjective and objective obligation is one only in appearance.

Let us turn to Prichard's own comments on the conclusion I have criticised. He notes that the difficulty put up for consideration is:

"That the obligation to do some action must depend on some character that the action would have, and not on our thinking that it would have some character .... It is resolved by denying that 'duty' is a property of an action as distinct from a person."[^20]

However, he no longer considers that this is a sufficient answer:

"This resolution, except indirectly, does not affect the difficulty - which is that if we ought e.g. to will something _X_, it must be in virtue of a character which willing _X_ would have and not in virtue of our thinking it would have it."[^20]

And so:

"The proper resolution is to point out that if 'willing _X_\textsuperscript* be substituted for 'bringing about _X_\textsuperscript*', then our thinking _X_ likely to effect something else _Y_ does enter into the character of the activity to which the 'ought' refers. For to will _X_, thinking it likely to produce _Y_, is one willing, and to will _X_, thinking it unlikely to produce _Y_, or to will _X_, not thinking of _Y_ at all, is another. In other words, the thinking enters into the character of the willing."

I have quoted the note at some length, and the last paragraph entire, because it seems to me that consideration of it is essential, not only for a just assessment of Prichard as a moral philosopher, but for our understanding of morality as a whole. There is, as I shall argue, a whole theory of ethics implicit in it.

One matter requires looking at by way of a preliminary. Prichard speaks of 'willing _X_\textsuperscript*' as to be substituted for 'bringing about _X_\textsuperscript', as that which, in any situation, we are obliged to do. This seems quite arbitrary on the surface, and it also seems to conflict with our ordinary experience of obligation. Surely in morality we are always obliged to perform actions, e.g. helping the needy, telling the truth, etc., and not merely to will their performance? What reason has

[^20]: Footnote or reference mark
Prichard for thus departing from our usual way of thinking?

Prichard's views on 'doing' may appear somewhat singular, but they are worth examining in this connection. By 'doing something' we mean, he says, "originating, causing, or bringing about the existence of something, viz. some new state of an existing thing or substance, or, more shortly, causing a change of state of some existing thing"; and so "by 'moving our hand' we mean causing a change of place of our hand; by 'posting a letter' we mean bringing about that a letter is in a pillar-box; and so on."\[21\] The fact that for Prichard even bodily movements represent a change brought about, provides the basis for the conclusions that follow. We can always, faced with a case of 'bringing about something', distinguish the bringing about, which is the action properly so called, and that which is brought about, which is not an action but the action's effect. This raises no problems where the 'bringing about' we have in mind is something like digging a ditch. Clearly digging is the action, and the ditch is that which is effected by the digging. But where the 'bringing about' is my moving my own hand, is it quite so obvious that one can distinguish the veritable action from the effect? Prichard assumes that one can. What we call bodily movements are, according to him, brought about; they are the effects of our activity. But how shall we characterise the activity in question? Shall we call it the activity of 'bringing about' or 'causing'? "On reflection" Prichard thinks, "We become forced to admit that .... there is no kind of activity consisting in bringing about something"\[22\]; "though causing a change may require an activity, it is not itself an activity".\[23\] But then what is the activity involved in bringing about simple bodily movements?
"There seems no resisting the conclusion that where we think of ourselves or of another as having done a certain action, the kind of activity of which we are thinking is that of willing (though we should have to add that we are thinking of our particular act of willing as having been the doing of the action in question, only because we think it caused a certain change), and that when we refer to some instance of this activity, such as our having moved our finger or given some friend a headache, we refer to it thus not because we think it was, or consisted in, the causing our finger to move or our friend's head to ache, but because we think it had a certain change of state as an effect."  

Thus, according to Prichard, human action consists essentially in willing.

There is something more than a little bizarre about such a view, but granted the initial assumption that action is a matter of bringing about some change, the conclusion follows. The obvious retort is, however, to say that, while it is true that acting must involve change of some kind, that is not to say that acting is the causing of a change. There is a change in the position of my finger when I move it, but its moving is not the effect of something else which I do; it is what I do. And Prichard, in trying to elaborate his position, runs immediately into difficulties, the chief of which is that that which I will must either be a change or an action. But it cannot be an action, since, according to him, the only action is willing. And, on the other hand, a change as such, as distinct from the bringing about of a change, does not seem to be the kind of thing which can be willed; although it is true we can wish for a change.

However, it is not necessary to accept Prichard's position with regard to action in order to follow his claim that we can only have an obligation to will something, and cannot have an obligation to bring it about. Certainly, if the only form of action is willing, then it is only willing that we can be obliged to do. But there are more substantial arguments, though perhaps these do not always emerge clearly
from the discussion.

An argument which seems to have carried a lot of weight with Prichard runs as follows. If that which I am obliged to do is to bring about some change, then it is impossible that I should ever know in advance that I have an obligation, in so far as I cannot ever know in advance that, when I will to bring about the change, it will in fact be brought about. If, despite my willing the change, I am unable to bring it about, then it must be concluded that I did not have an obligation after all, since I cannot have an obligation to do that which I am unable to do. Only in retrospect could one know that one had had an obligation, that is to say, when one looks back in the knowledge that one had in fact brought about the change one willed. Equally, one could not know that one had had an obligation to do $x$, if one had simply failed to will it, since one then would not know whether, if one had willed it, one would have brought it about. But we do, Prichard thinks, know in advance that we have an obligation to do something, at least on occasion. And it does seem as if we know, occasionally, in retrospect that we have not done something that we ought to have done. It follows, then, that that which we have an obligation to do is something which we know we can do, namely will.

There is a second, connected argument which he also uses. It is that, if what I am obliged to do is always to bring about some change, and if I can never know in advance that I can bring about the change in question, then, not only can I not know that I have a duty, I cannot ever do my duty either. This is because Prichard thinks that, in order for me to do my duty, in the strict sense of 'do', I must do it in the knowledge that it is my duty. And this knowledge, for the reasons given above, I cannot have. Therefore, if I am to do my duty,
that which I am obliged to do must be something which I can know to be a duty, namely to will.

This last argument may not appear a very strong one, but it fore¬shadows an argument which does, I think, justify Prichard in concentrating on 'willing X' as opposed to 'bringing X about'. It is that, in the sense in which morality is concerned with actions, an action is never the mere bringing about of something, but is always the willing of something. This is reflected in two ways. We do not say of someone, who accidentally and unconsciously brings about a certain result, that he has done his duty (in any morally interesting sense of 'done his duty'), even if we think that it was his duty to bring about that result. So also, if a person wills to bring about a certain result which he knows that he has a duty to bring about, and unintentionally brings about some other result, we do not think of him as having failed to do his duty (in any morally interesting sense of 'failed to do his duty'). It is almost as if, from a moral point of view, one is taken as having done that which one willed to do, irrespective of whether that which one willed to bring about was, in fact, brought about. And this does give us a reason to accept Prichard's suggestion that that which we are obliged to do is not to bring about something but to will.

Let us suppose that we do admit for the present that there is case for saying that that which we are obliged to do is to will. Where does that leave us with respect to the paragraph which I quoted earlier? "Our thinking X likely to effect something else Y does enter into the character of the activity to which the 'ought' refers .... the thinking enters into the character of the willing". How are we to understand this? Perhaps in the following way. The over-simple presentation of
the subjective thesis is that one man, who thinks that X will bring about Y and that therefore he ought to will X, has thereby an obligation to will X; whereas another man, who does not think that X will bring about Y and who does not therefore see himself as having an obligation to will X, does not have an obligation to will X. But how does the sole ground of difference between the two men, the fact that one thinks that X will bring about Y and the other does not, entail that one is obliged and the other is not with respect to the same action, viz. willing X? Prichard's answer, if I understand him correctly, is that that which the first man is obliged to do, as a result of thinking that willing X would produce Y, is, strictly speaking, not the same action as that which the second man is not obliged to do. The former is obliged, so to say, to will X as causing Y; whereas that which the latter is not obliged to will is X on its own. It is clear also that a person, who does not think that willing X would bring about Y, cannot will X as causing Y, and that he cannot have an obligation to do that which he cannot do. On the positive side we can say that, if a man sees himself as having an obligation to will X in virtue of the fact that it will bring about Y, then he is really seeing himself as having an obligation to will Y. And so his deciding to will X is, in effect, his deciding to will Y. Let us suppose that Y is 'the just solution to a dispute'. For a man who thinks himself duty bound to seek a just solution to a dispute, and who thinks that success in his search depends on his willing X, the obligation to will X is inescapable. But suppose he is mistaken and that his willing X is quite irrelevant to the bringing about of a just solution? This objection, which seems so formidable when that which we see ourselves obliged to do is to bring about some change, loses its force when we substitute, for bringing about, willing
the change in question. This is because what gives character to the willing is the end intended, and not the result actually achieved. If someone, in the course of bringing about \( Y \) (i.e., in the course of trying to bring about \( Y \)), inadvertently brings about something else \( Z \), then, although we must say that he brought about \( Z \) and not \( Y \), we do not say that he willed \( Z \). From this there follows the conclusion that difference in factual beliefs, which are the sort of 'thoughts' Prichard considers, cannot be the cause of differences in what people have a duty to do. This is easily seen. For suppose two people are agreed in thinking that one ought, as a matter of moral principle, to bring about \( Y \), but one holds that the way to do this is to do \( X \), and the other holds that the way to do it is to do not-\( X \). The former is obliged to will, not \( X \) as such, but \( X \) as causing \( Y \), and the latter is obliged to will, not not-\( X \) as such, but not-\( X \) as causing \( Y \); and this comes down to their both being obliged to will \( Y \).

The dilemma of objective and subjective obligation will thus be got around, in a way that does justice to its two sides. Although one's duty, in the sense of that which one ought ultimately to will, depends on the facts, nevertheless the form which one's willing will take—what we might inexactely call one's 'immediate' duty—must depend on one's thought about the facts. And the form which willing \( Y \) must take for someone who believes, rightly or wrongly, that \( Y \) can only be brought about by doing \( X \), is of willing \( X \) as causing \( Y \).

But this does still suppose that we know what we ought to do in general, although we may, from our imperfect knowledge of facts, be unsure how exactly this knowledge is to be applied in particular situations. I think we can see, however, that the same difficulties arise where our uncertainty is not about facts, but about what we ought
to do, i.e. specifically moral uncertainty. One could, of course, take
the extreme line of denying that we ever are in doubt about moral
principles, but this is not Prichard's view. Is the latter's
solution available for these cases also? I think it must be. In
other words, in a situation where a person is unsure about what he ought
to will in general, but thinks he ought to will y, then, if he would
will his duty, he has no alternative but to will that which he thinks
is his duty, namely y. His having to will y depends, therefore, on his
thinking that y is his duty, whether it is or not. But this phrase
'whether it is or not' presents a problem. It must mean 'whether y is
his duty or not'. And how can we say 'whether y is his duty or not'
when we have already said that he has a duty to will y? 'Duty' must be
being used here in two different senses. But what are these two
senses?

We might make a contrast between that which is a duty in a
particular concrete case and that which is a duty in general; and say
that a person has here and now a duty to will y if he thinks that willing
y is a duty in general, whether or not it is a duty in general. This
manages to avoid formal contradiction, but it is not, I think, satisfac-
tory. I say this because I cannot understand what it could mean to
say that something is a duty in general, if it is possible that nobody
has, or ever had, an actual duty to do it. And yet it would follow
from the distinction given above that if nobody thinks, or ever has
thought, that y is a duty, then nobody has, or ever had, an actual duty
to do y. A more satisfactory solution is to utilise an ambiguity
present in Prichard's statement of the problem in Duty and Ignorance of
Fact: If a man has an obligation to do some action, does the obligation
depend on the facts, or on his thought about the facts? I have in mind
the point that 'the obligation' can mean (a) that which I am obliged to do, and (b) the being obliged. One can say, on the lines of the earlier resolution, that my being obliged depends on the facts, i.e. on my being a moral agent, whereas the form my being obliged takes, i.e. the content of my obligation, depends on what I think I am obliged to do. But there still remains the problem of the phrase 'whether it is (my obligation, my duty) or not': how are we to accommodate this? It can be argued, I think, that the phrase must drop out of the solution as formulated, since its presence there implies, in contradiction to the spirit of the solution, that there is in fact a definite content to my 'being obliged' which the actual giving of content must correspond to. And I do not see why we should not just say that querying whether something is or is not my duty has a place only within the context of giving content to my obligation.

One consequence of this view which I have been developing would be that obligation, in the sense of a specific obligation, is no more a character of a person than it is a character of an action. For if 'having a duty to do Y' were a character of a person, it would have to be a fact that somebody or other had a duty to do Y. And I have argued that it makes no sense to wonder whether somebody has a duty to do Y outside of the context in which he gives content to his obligation. But what about within that context? Surely it makes sense to say of someone, who thinks Y is his duty, that he has a duty to will Y? And is his having the duty to will Y not then a character of him? This, I think, can be denied. In the case of someone who mistakenly thinks that only by doing X can he bring about Y, we said that his willing Y must take the form of willing X as causing Y. But we did not thereby commit ourselves to the view that doing X actually would bring about Y.
In this latter case, therefore, although we are saying that, for the person who thinks Y is his duty, willing to do his duty must take the form of willing Y as being hid duty, we are not thereby committed to the view that willing Y actually is his duty. Therefore we are not committed to thinking of obligation, in the sense of some specific obligation, e.g. the obligation to will Y, as a character of a person.

If one is thinking of the other sense of obligation, of the 'being obliged' or 'being under obligation' which is only another name for being a moral agent, then one would want to say, perhaps, that this is a character of persons. I shall raise the matter again in a later chapter.

Returning to the first sense of obligation, if it is not a character of actions (obligatoriness or ought-to-beness), nor a character of persons (obligedness), what is it? And an answer that comes to mind is that it may be - roughly - a character of our thinking about actions. In plain language, when we think of doing Y as being a duty, we are not thinking of Y as having a certain character, but we are thinking of Y in a certain way, viewing it in a special light. The 'ought' expresses not what is apprehended, but how whatever it is is apprehended. It is adverbial, we might say, not adjectival. Quite what this means, what the nature of this 'special light' is and so on will be more fully explained when I come to develop my own positive suggestions in chapter four.

In following out the logic of Prichard's argument in Duty and Ignorance of Fact, I have gone some considerable way beyond what he himself says, or would, I think, be prepared to allow. He himself never carried the argument further than to apply it to the objective-subjective dilemma as it concerns our uncertainty about facts, and in
one place, his late essay Moral Obligation, he seems explicitly to reject
the kind of extension of it that I have been making. It is a passage
where he is criticising the view, supposedly Kant's, that we have no
duty except to act in a morally good manner, i.e., except to perform
actions from the thought by itself that they are what one ought to do.
Prichard points out the incoherence of this, that, if there is no duty
except to act in a morally good manner, then the idea that we have a
duty to do some X or bring about some Y must be mistaken. And he
comments:

"If (Kant) succeeds in persuading us that our idea that there can
be actions which we ought to do is false, he will render it
impossible for us to act morally, for we cannot be led to act on
an idea which we know to be false, and therefore no longer have".

Clearly this is an objection which is relevant to the account of
obligation I was developing latterly. I merely note it here to show
where Prichard stands vis-a-vis that account. I leave the full
discussion of it to a later chapter.

Looking back over Prichard's writings on ethics, one can see how
he, like Moore, wrestles with the idea that in our moral judgements we
are saying that something has a certain character or property. Where
he differs from Moore is in not being wedded to the view that it is some
particular type of thing which has the character or property in question.
Moore's position is summed up in his essay The Nature of Moral Philosophy,
written in 1921:

"One thing, I think, is clear about intrinsic value, namely that
it is only actual occurrences, actual states of affairs over a
certain period of time - not such things as men, or character,
or material things, that can have any intrinsic value at all."

Prichard, as we have seen, was much more flexible. His earliest view,
that the character implied by moral judgements is a character of actions,
is developed explicitly in criticism of the view held by Moore, that it
is a character of states of affairs. Later on he came to see
difficulties in his own view, difficulties which impelled him to say that what was involved was not a character of actions, but rather a character of persons, the character, namely, of being obliged, or of having a duty, to do something. And what I have been suggesting over the last few pages is that the argument, by which he justifies this second switch, would, if carried to its logical conclusion, necessitate a switch of a more radical kind, away from the view that in moral judgements we say that something has a certain character, to the view that we thereby express the way in which we are regarding a state of affairs or an action. In this suggestion as such there is nothing new. The emotive theory, for example, is an attempt to interpret moral judgements along these lines. Yet it seems to me that emotivists go seriously wrong in their account of morality, and that they do so through failing to grasp the significance of the more radical switch I have referred to. This is something I will return to in the appendix.

I have argued that the tendency of Prichard's argument relating to the dilemma of the objective-subjective basis of obligation is to undermine the view that in moral judgements we are saying that something or other has a certain character. In this respect he goes far beyond Hartmann, who differed from Moore only to the extent of denying that goodness or ought-to-be is a character. Indeed, Hartmann's own brand of intuitionism, for all that it employs the concept of 'essence' and deals with goodness in modal terms, is very much rooted in the idea that moral judgements express characters of persons or states of affairs. And this, after all, is only what we should expect. For it is hard to see on what other grounds moral experience could be held to be the key to moral judgements, if it is not that it admits us to the facts which moral judgements express; the facts in question being some-
thing to the effect that there exist states of affairs having a certain character. If we let our minds dwell on that for a moment, Prichard's argument will be seen in its true significance, as a criticism of intuitionism, of the view that morality can satisfactorily be analysed in terms of moral experience.

But there is yet another area in which Prichard's careful probing helps to underline a difficulty in the intuitionist approach to ethics, and to this I want now to turn my attention. I have in mind the problem of the relation between someone's having a duty to do something and his having a motive to do it, which caused Prichard — in this matter an orthodox intuitionist — so much trouble. Even a casual reader of Prichard's ethical writings would be struck by the vehemence with which he maintains that moral questions, i.e. questions about what one ought to do, cannot be reduced to questions of any other sort. It was, indeed, because he saw moral philosophers as wedded to this kind of approach that he asked, does moral philosophy rest on a mistake? In the article which has that question as its title, Prichard notes that a great many writers on ethics have seen it as their function to supplement the ordinary sense we have that we ought to do this or that, with a demonstration that this is really the case; and their demonstration has taken one of two forms. They have, on the one hand, tried to find a way by which it could be proved that the action in question really is what we ought to do. And, on the other hand, they have tried to show that the action which we ought to do it is in our interest to do.

I have said enough already on Prichard's objections to explaining our having a duty to do something in terms of intrinsic goodness or ought-to-beness, so let us turn to the second form of demonstration, the attempt to show that doing our duty will be in our interest. At
first sight it is hard to grasp what relevance the question, 'Is this in my interest?', has to the question, 'Is this my duty?', and the natural response is to say, as Prichard does, that, while knowing that doing an action is in our interest might incline us to do it, it would not make it a whit more likely that we ought to do it.

"The answer (that keeping our engagements is in our interest) is, of course, no answer, for it fails to convince us that we ought to keep our engagements; even if successful on its own lines, it only makes us want to keep them."

But later on he came to think that there was more to this question than at first appeared.

It is reopened and considered at length in the inaugural lecture, Duty and Interest. In that lecture Prichard raises the question, why so many philosophers have tried to show that by doing one's duty one will, at the same time, be acting in one's interest. An explanation for the prominence of this kind of demonstration in ethics might be, that it is felt that there is an overriding duty to procure one's own happiness or to act in one's own interest; so that, before making up one's mind that one has a duty to do something else, one has first to check that the former duty is not being neglected. Now there may be a duty, other things being equal, to see to one's own interest, which would account for our wanting to say sometimes that self-mutilation and self-deprivation are not merely foolish, but wrong. But it is difficult to think of anyone who has held that this is the only duty we have, or that it is a duty before which all other duties must give way. So that can hardly be what has prompted philosophers to argue that, if we do our duty, we will be acting in our own interest.

May it not be, though, that, while acting in our own interest is not our sole duty, nor even our overriding duty, yet it is a necessary condition of something being our duty that it should be in our interest
This is, Prichard thinks, incoherent. For if we say that acting in our interest is not the sole duty, we imply that there are other kinds of action whose character is such that we have a duty to do them. But—here is the difficulty—one cannot say that an action is a duty because it is, for example, helping someone in need, and not a duty unless it is in one's own interest, unless one can show that the action's having that character of being the helping of someone in need itself necessitates its also being in one's own interest. This, however, one cannot show. One can never demonstrate more than a general probability that in performing an action of that type one would be also acting in one's own interest. Even if one had more than probability, even if one knew of the existence of an omnipotent Being who would reward us for doing our duty and punish us for neglecting it, the difficulty would not be surmounted. That would only show that, as a matter of fact, anyone who helps someone in need will also be acting in his own interest. It would not, then, be the fact that his action is the helping of someone in need, and therefore the doing of his duty, which would necessitate its being in his interest, or at least not that fact alone; but that fact plus the fact that there exists an omnipotent Being to reward him for acting thus. In order to show that an action's being the helping of someone in need is a sufficient condition for it being in the agent's interest, you would need to be able to show that the action's having that character, or its being a duty, entailed the existence of an omnipotent Being to reward him for doing it. And this, clearly, cannot be shown. If we want, therefore, to maintain that it is a necessary condition of something being our duty that it should be in our interest to do it, we must abandon the idea that an action can be a duty in virtue of its possessing a character other than that of its
being in our interest.

It may be, of course, that certain moral philosophers have confused moral and non-moral uses of the word 'ought'. Something which it is in my interest to do is, by the same token, something which I ought to do, in the non-moral sense of 'ought'; and those philosophers may have supposed that, by demonstrating that it is in my interest to do this or that action and that therefore I ought to do it, they were also demonstrating that I ought to do it in the sense which is peculiar to morality. Where this fails as an explanation, from Prichard's point of view, is in that the confusion between the different senses of 'ought' seems relatively easy to dispel. Whereas once one has been caught by the idea that it must be possible, if one has a duty to do something, to show that it is in one's interest to do it, it seems not at all easy to get free.

For this reason Prichard is more inclined to trace this idea to a thought which he thinks is present, albeit unobtrusively, in the writings of Plato and Butler. It is that, unless a motive can be supplied for doing one's duty, over and above the fact that it is one's duty, people will not do it. Or, to put the matter more strongly, people cannot be expected to do it. And, of course, they cannot be expected to do their duty in any and every circumstance unless the motive supplied is an overriding motive. But why should philosophers have thought this? Perhaps because they believe, Prichard suggests, that "the desire for some good to oneself is the only motive of deliberate action", or that, at any rate, "an action must have a motive" and having a duty to do something is not a motive or, anyway, not an overriding one. In other words, the preoccupation of moral philosophers with what is in one's interest arises out of certain views
about the character of human motivation; views which exclude the
thought that something is a duty being a motive, or at least a
sufficient motive, for action. And, indeed, so long as we think of an
action's being a duty as the being an action of a certain kind, it is
reasonable enough to think in these terms. For we do think that,
generally speaking, it is one thing to show that an action is of a
certain kind, and another to show that one has a motive to perform such
an action. From which we conclude that it is, in the same way, one
thing to show that an action is one which we ought to do, and another to
show that it is one which we have a motive to do. And if we are
concerned, as moral philosophers very often are, that people should do
their duty, and we think that, unless motive is supplied them, they
will not do it, we will naturally want to argue that they have a motive,
in that, by doing their duty, they will be acting in their own best
interests.

But there are disturbing consequences of such a view to which
Prichard draws our attention. The one that he stresses particularly
is that, on the view that people will perform their duties only if they
can be shown to be in their interest, there will be no such thing as
moral goodness. This is obvious enough since we say that somebody's
action has moral goodness only if the thought that it was his duty was
the motive, or part of the motive, for his doing it. That is to say,
there would be no difference in motive between the good man who does his
duty, and the bad man who neglects it or who recognises no such thing.
The most we could say is that the bad man is mistaken in thinking that
acting as he does is in his interest.

Secondly, a view of this kind, has the implication that no actions
are disinterested. And this does seem to be out of step with our
ordinary conviction that certain actions are disinterested, in the sense that they are done for themselves or for the sake of something else which is not one's own interest. These need not be good actions. A person can be disinterestedly bad, for example someone who acts out of spite, although conscious that in doing so he is harming his own interests.

These consequences make the view under discussion an uncomfortable one to hold. And it is for this reason that we need to look again at the assumptions which underlie it. The first of these assumptions and one which it seems possible to deny is that desire is the only motive for acting, or, more exactly, that the thought of something which one desires is the only motive for acting. Prichard himself in his 1912 essay denied that this was so:

"We mean by a motive what moves us to act; a sense of obligation does sometimes move us to act; and in our ordinary consciousness we should not hesitate to allow that the action we were considering might have had as its motive a sense of obligation. Desire and the sense of obligation are coordinate forms or species of motive."31

In Duty and Interest, sixteen years later, he took up the question again:

"It should be noted that the doctrine under consideration, viz. that our motive in doing any action is desire for some good to ourselves to which we think the action will lead, has two negative implications. The first is that the thought, or, alternatively, the knowledge, that some action is right has no influence on us in acting, i.e. that the thought, or the knowledge, that an action is a duty can neither be our motive nor even an element in our motive .... The second implication is that there is no such thing as a desire to do what is right, or more fully, a desire to do some action in virtue of its being a duty".32

However, coming to the question for the second time, Prichard modified his views somewhat. Instead of arguing that a sense of obligation provides a motive which stands over against desire, he endeavours to explain the former in terms of desire, the desire, namely, to do one's duty. In other words, he opts to deny the second of the two negative
implications he refers to. It is not clear, however, whether Prichard
is suggesting that all human beings have this desire as part of their
natural endowment, or whether that certain people do happen to have it.

It is, I think, worth examining Prichard's reasons for denying the
one implication rather than the other, since the first is, on the face
of it, the more natural one to choose, and, moreover, the one he himself
seemed to choose in his earlier essay. I say it is the more natural
one to choose because we do ordinarily say that we did an action because
it was our duty, which seems to mean that the thought that it was our
duty is itself a motive. And also we do very often think of a person
who carries out his duty in difficult circumstances as having to go
against his desires and inclinations.

Prichard objects to this view, that the thought that something is
a duty is itself a motive, that it

"involves that where we are said to have done some action
because we thought it right, though we had a motive for what we
did, we had no purpose in doing it. For we really mean by our
purpose in doing some action that the desire of which for its
own sake leads us to do the action. Again, if we face the
purely general question 'Can we really do anything whatever
unless in some respect or other we desire to do it?' we have to
answer 'No'" 33

And Prichard clearly thinks that an action which lacks a purpose, e.g.
a purely reflex action, is not an action in the sense of the word
which particularly interests moral philosophers.

If we accept this last point, that morality concerns itself with
purposive behaviour, we can still deny that purpose need be analysed in
terms of desire. Prichard himself scouts an alternative view in Does
Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake? In that article he argues that
when we act from a sense of obligation we have no purpose, in the sense
of something the desire of which leads us to act. But the implication
of this is not that we have no purpose at all, but that, if we have a
purpose, it is not to be explained in terms of desire. The reason for leaving this possibility open is that we do generally think that a person who acts from a sense of obligation is acting in a purposive way, i.e. has a purpose in so acting. But how are we to define this 'purpose' if not as that the desire of which leads us to act? My suggestion is that it is that for the sake of which we act. This may not seem much of a difference, in as much as we frequently interchange the expressions 'acting from the desire of x' and 'acting for the sake of x', but I think they can be used to mean quite distinct things. This is obscured by there being two senses of the expression 'acting for the sake of x'. In the first sense 'acting for the sake of x' is contrasted with 'acting for the sake of something to which x is a means'. That is, when you say that you are acting for the sake of x in this sense, you are asserting that it really is x which is your purpose; where by 'purpose' is understood 'something which you desire', you are asserting that it really is x which you desire. But there is a second sense of 'acting for the sake of x' where the contrast is with 'acting from the desire of x'. When you say that you are acting for the sake of x in this latter sense, you are asserting that you are acting thus because of what x is, and not because you happen to desire x. Thus I tell the truth for its own sake when I do so because of what telling the truth is, whether I feel like telling the truth or not. I am therefore prepared to admit that every deliberate action must have a purpose, in the sense that there must be something for the sake of which it is done. It seems to me, however, that the notion of acting for the sake of something is a less specific notion than that of acting from the desire of something. So that it does not follow from the fact that every deliberate action has a purpose, that in every such
action one is acting from desire.

That being said, I do think that there is a kernel of truth in the idea that we will not do anything unless we desire to do it. It is that we will not do anything which does not have some kind of interest for us or for which one does not see the point. But there is nothing to prevent the interest or point of an action being the fact that it is what we ought to do. In that event, the purpose, that for the sake of which the action is done, is the action itself; the motive is the thought that the action is one's duty. Of course it seems strange to say that that for the sake of which an action is done is the action itself, but that is only because, when we ask 'For the sake of what did he do that action?', or 'What was his purpose in doing that action?,' we imply that we think that he did not do the action for its own sake, but for the sake of something else. Prichard himself saw no difficulty in the identifying the action with the purpose:

"It is no objection to urge that an action cannot be its own purpose, since the purpose of something cannot be the thing itself. For, speaking strictly, the purpose is not the action's purpose but our purpose, and there is no contradiction in holding that our purpose in acting may be the action."

I am therefore inclined to reject this argument of Prichard's, that, if the thought that something is our duty is our motive for doing it, we have no purpose in so acting, and that therefore our motive for doing our duty must be our desire to do it. Prichard had, however, a secondary line of argument. We do speak of someone as having a sense of duty, and even as having a stronger sense of duty than another, and what can this describe except the possession by individuals in different degrees of a desire to do their duty?

"For we obviously are referring to a fact when we speak of someone as possessing a sense of duty and, again, a strong sense of duty. And if we consider what we are thinking of in these individuals whom we think of as possessing it, we
find we cannot exclude from it a desire to do what is a duty, as such, or for its own sake, or, more simply, a desire to do what is a duty.”

There is, therefore, a desire to do one's duty which can serve as the motive of moral action.

Nevertheless, I do not think that Prichard is right to identify the sense of duty with the desire to do one's duty. When we say of someone that he has a strong sense of duty, we are, in effect, praising him; whereas in saying that he has a strong desire to do his duty we are not doing anything of the kind. I say this because we attribute moral goodness to a man not on the strength of his having a desire, even a strong desire, to do his duty, but on the strength of his acting on that desire. On the other hand, when we say of a man that he has a strong sense of duty, we imply that from that fact alone his actions, generally speaking, have moral goodness. No doubt this objection can be got around if we argue that by "having a strong sense of duty" we mean not just "having a strong desire to do one's duty", but "having the desire to do one's duty habitually as the operative motive in one's actions". But in that case one could just as easily define it as "having habitually as the operative motive in one's actions the thought that something is one's duty". There seems no reason to prefer the one alternative to the other.

Because Prichard chooses to explain the motive we have to do our duty in terms of a desire, albeit a disinterested desire, to do our duty, he meets difficulties when he comes to discuss what happens when there is a conflict between duty and inclination. For, on his account, this is not a conflict between desire and something else, but a conflict of desires. And it is idle to point out that the desire to do one's duty is disinterested since, on his own showing, certain desires on the
side of inclination are disinterested as well. At the same time, the conflict is not one that can be solved by us simply acting on the basis of which desire is stronger; otherwise we could not criticise someone in whom inclination overcame the desire to do his duty, except as mistaking which really was the stronger desire. Prichard tries to surmount the difficulty by stressing the incommensurability of the desire to do one's duty and the desire of happiness. Because they are incommensurable, he argues, whether we act from one or the other, this is not a product of choice, i.e. not a result of preferring one course of action to an alternative on the basis of something common to both, but a decision. However, this can hardly seem satisfactory as a final solution. What is important is not whether we use the word 'choice' or 'decision', but whether it is possible to give a reason for what one chooses or decides to do. It may be true that where there are no grounds of comparison, then we have no rational justification for preferring one alternative to the other, and are thus forced to decide arbitrarily between them. But this cannot be our situation when the desire to do our duty clashes with some other desire. For it is of the essence of such a clash - as Prichard would no doubt agree - that we should always decide in favour of duty. To represent the opting to do one's duty as arbitrary, which is what Prichard seems to do, is as much as to say that there is no reason to do one's duty as opposed to anything else, and it is, incidentally, to suggest that in doing one's duty, far from desire being the motive, there is no motive at all. I say this because, although it is true that we have a motive to do our duty in the shape of our desire to do it, we do not have a motive to do our duty as opposed to anything else. That is to say, we have no motive to decide in one way rather than in another.
For these reasons I think we must give up the attempt to explain our motive to do our duty in terms of a desire to do it, and instead look for some way to explain how the thought that something is a duty can be, in itself, a motive to do it. But this, I suggest, we cannot do so long as we think of someone's having a duty to do an action as being either a character of the action or a character of the agent (whether his having this character is due to his thinking certain things about the action, or not). For to think in these terms is to represent one's having a duty as a state of affairs in which one can find oneself, irrespective of whether or not one takes an interest in doing one's duty. And, that being the case, must not the grounds, on which it is maintained that one then has a motive, be external and additional to the fact that one has a duty to do something? Yet if we need to go beyond the fact that one has a duty, in order to supply a motive to do it, it cannot be that the thought that something is a duty is by itself a motive.

In other words, I am arguing that from the standpoint of moral experience it is impossible satisfactorily to explain how it is that a man, who has a duty, has also a motive to do it. If, further, we take this in conjunction with my earlier criticism, that from the standpoint of moral experience it is likewise impossible to resolve the dilemma arising from the subjective and objective aspects of 'having a duty', the case against an intuitionist approach to ethics begins, to my mind, to look conclusive. And it is then hard not to feel some sympathy with those who have argued that morality can only be made sense of through the adopting of some other line of approach, perhaps through an analysis of moral reasoning.
References

Unless otherwise indicated all page references in this chapter are to H.A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation* (the Oxford Paperback edition, which includes the inaugural lecture 'Duty and Interest').

1. P.H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, p. 34
3. pp. 5-6
4. p. 4
5. cf. pp. 158-63
6. p. 163
7. p. 93
8. p. 163
9. p. 93
10. p. 94
11. p. 37
12. p. 94
13. p. 37
14. p. 33
15. p. 18
16. p. 30
17. p. 29
18. p. 31
19. p. 37
20. p. 38
21. p. 19
22. p. 32
23. p. 180
24. p. 190
25. cf. pp. 9-10, note
26. pp. 155-6
27. G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, p. 327
28. p. 3
29. p. 221
30. p. 135
31. p. 11
32. pp. 223-4
33. pp. 224-5
34. p. 10, note
35. p. 225
CHAPTER III

MORAL REASONING

In the first two chapters I have been considering philosophers (Moore, Hartmann, and Prichard) whose explanation of what we are saying when we say that we ought to do something, takes the form of an analysis of moral experience. They are agreed in treating moral judgements as the expression of a certain type of experience which is suí generis, and in the view that what we are conscious of in such an experience is that something (either an action or an agent) has a certain character or property. I have shown how this conception is the source of difficulties which remain unresolved in Moore's ethics: how, through the distinction introduced by Hartmann, between values in their character as different essences and values in their character of being valuable, it becomes possible to reconcile what are for Moore mutually exclusive ways of regarding goodness; and how even this resolution is found to be inadequate, in the face of the difficulties which Prichard explores. I have also tried to make intelligible the emergence of emotivism in response to the breakdown of the intuitionist theory.

I would suggest, however, that emotivism be not considered as a successor to the view developed by Moore and company. My reason for this is partly that the proponents of emotivism - Stevenson being an exception - were not principally interested in ethics, and consequently had little incentive to work beyond the first crude expression of their view. But, taking the matter deeper, my reason is that emotivism is, at bottom, less of a theory of ethics, and more a turning away from such a theory. It is, in effect, the denial that there is anything for there to be a theory about. As such it expresses an attitude
which everyone is prone to take up in response to failure to work out an adequate theory, but it is not an attitude in which it is easy permanently to rest. (I expand on these remarks in the Appendix) The emotivism of the nineteen-thirties did, however, prepare the way for an alternative theory, in that it helped to break the hold on philosophers of the idea that all sentences of the subject-predicate type are statements. The emotivists' suggestion, that moral judgements are not used to state facts but to express and enforce attitudes, opened the way to a better understanding of the different functions which language has. Once it was realised that moral judgements need not be statements, it was only a short step to realising that the key to their understanding was not the experience, for there might not be such, of which they are the account, but the context of reasoning in which they occur.

Consequently, in the new phase of ethical inquiry - the post-intuitionist phase - philosophers trying to understand what we are saying when we say that we ought to do something have concentrated on the analysis of moral reasoning. They have differed, however, over the conclusions which are to be drawn from such an analysis. There are philosophers such as R.M. Hare, who consider that the analysis of moral reasoning can do no more than lay bare its formal, i.e. logical, features, and cannot by itself yield specific moral principles. And there are others, sometimes called Descriptivists or Neo-naturalists, who feel that any analysis of moral reasoning must bring out the fact that it embodies a certain kind of interest, and that this interest sets a limit to what may meaningfully be described as a moral principle.

In the pages that follow I am attempting to do two things. First of all I wish to give some account of these different approaches to the analysis of moral reasoning. But secondly, and chiefly, I want to
demonstrate that the theories based on these analyses are just as open
to criticism as the intuitionist theories, in the light of the
difficulties which Prichard brought to our attention. And I therefore
argue that we consider those difficulties further, as a means to the
working out of a more adequate ethical theory.

R.M. Hare

In the case of R.M. Hare, the first aim, the presentation of his
views, raises problems which can only be met by a discussion at some
length. The object of this discussion is to suggest a perspective from
which his ethical philosophy will be comprehensible as a whole. I hope
thereby to avoid the charge which can be levelled at many of Hare's
critics, that they have fastened on isolated elements of his theory
without having made the effort to grasp them in context.

Our problem at the beginning is to find a suitable point of entry
into Hare's moral philosophy, and here my own view, which the outcome
alone can justify, is that the place to start is in the Introduction to
the book Freedom and Reason. In that Introduction Professor Hare asks
us to put ourselves imaginatively in the position of someone faced with
a serious moral problem. There are, he says, two things which we find
ourselves wanting to say in this situation, "the combination of which
seems to confront us, as philosophers, with a paradox, or even an
antinomy". The first is:

"That a man who is faced with such a problem knows that it is
his problem, and that nobody can answer it for him".

While he can, it is true, increase his knowledge of the attendant facts
and can take advice from other people; still, in the end, it is only
he himself who can decide what to do on the basis of those facts, that
advice. And this reflects our ordinary conviction that "one of the
most important constituents of our freedom, as moral agents, is the freedom to form our own opinions about moral questions." 3 That is one side of the matter. Yet at the same time we do find ourselves wanting to insist:

"that the answering of moral questions is, or ought to be, a rational activity .... We do not feel that it does not matter what we think about them - that the answering of moral questions is a quite arbitrary business .... We feel, rather, that it matters very much what answer we give, and that the finding of an answer is a task that should engage our rational powers to the limit of their capacity."

Here, then, is the paradox, the antinomy, to which the book *Freedom and Reason* should provide the solution.

But let us first be clear about what the paradox consists in. No doubt we do feel in a vague way that the two sets of claims do not square with one another, but we should be able to render this vague sense precise. However, when we try to state the paradox in more precise terms, difficulties spring up which check us; the paradox itself no longer looks so obvious.

It is natural to take Hare as meaning that, on the one hand, a man faced with a moral problem is responsible for the way in which he answers it, and that his answer is his own in that sense, and that, on the other hand, it matters that he give the right answer. But if this is our interpretation, there is no paradox. There is nothing at all paradoxical in maintaining that there is a right answer to the moral problem which faces the man, and that he is responsible for giving it, i.e. he is to be criticised if his answer is the wrong one and to be commended if it is the right one. One would certainly want to make both statements with reference to someone, a child say, who is doing a multiplication sum. No one doubts that arithmetic is a rational activity and that the answers we give to multiplication sums matter.
But neither would anyone doubt that the child is responsible for the answers he gives in a way in which a parrot, for instance, is not; in so far as it lies within the child's capacity to work out the right answer. So it looks as if, for there to be a paradox here, man's freedom to form his own opinions on moral questions must be something more than his being responsible for the answers he gives. And, indeed, Hare says that it is something different from and more extensive than our freedom to form our own opinions about matters of fact, or in mathematics.

The difficulty is, however, to see what further meaning Hare can be reading into the notion 'It's for him to decide'. He cannot mean that the answer to a man's moral problem is simply the answer, whatever it is, which he gives. For then we would have, not a paradox which might be resolved, but a flat contradiction. It is impossible to hold that it matters what answer we give to a moral problem, if we also hold that, for any answer, the fact of our having given it withdraws it from criticism. It would, anyway, hardly be an ordinary conviction to which one could allude as a matter of course. Whatever conclusion people might come to accept as a result of philosophical argument, they do not generally start out thinking that the answer to a man's moral problem can be up to himself in that way.

From what Hare says in the Introduction and elsewhere, a possible third interpretation emerges. It is that he thinks of a man's answer to a moral problem as being his in a special sense - not in the sense in which any answer he would give is one he is responsible for, nor in the sense in which his opting for one answer rather than another brings it about that that is the answer. But what is this special sense? Hare would, I think, want to say that a man who is trying to answer a moral
problem is on his own, in the sense that whatever he learns of the facts, whatever advice he receives, whatever guidance is afforded him by the moral practices of his society, is never anything more than material for reflection. He gathers from it, not dictates which command his assent, but sources of suggestion which he, as an individual, has still to try out for himself. And in so far as these enter into his answering of the moral problem, they do so, not as something foreign imposed on his moral thinking from the outside, but as something which has been taken up into his moral thinking and which, by implication, he has succeeded in making his own.

If we accept this as the burden of the first part of Hare's paradox, that a man in the face of a moral problem has to stand on his own two feet and cannot look to moral cribs to save him from the strain of moral thinking, do we have the antinomy such as Hare describes? Is this view, on first inspection anyway, out of keeping with the belief that the answering of moral questions is a rational activity and that it matters what answer you give to a moral problem?

It is certainly arguable that, if there is a rational way of answering moral questions - the method of deductive inference, let us say, then a man could follow a moral argument from its premises to its conclusion with only that part of himself which apprehends deductive inference. That is to say, without any particular moral engagement in the problem. Moral problems might then be answered, like a simple multiplication sum, mechanically and by rote. Whereas, it was stressed in the first part of the paradox that, in so far as one does answer a moral problem, it must be through an effort of peculiarly moral thinking, moral engagement. There may be all sorts of facts of which one can make oneself aware, all sorts of moral principles floating, as it were,
in the atmosphere around one, but, until such time as one has made sense of the facts for oneself and taken over the principles as one's own, they cannot contribute anything to the solution of what is, after all, one's own and nobody else's problem. And, it needs to be said, a moral principle does not become one's own by the mere fact of being apprehended; but only through a process of moral thinking.

To put the matter in a different way, if the thing that matters when a man is faced with a moral problem is that the answer he gives should be the right answer, how can we also say that the thing that matters is that the answer he gives should be his answer? We would be saying, in effect, that the first consideration in forming a moral judgement is that the judgement should be such and such, and also that the first consideration is that the judgement should be one's own. And herein lies the paradox.

In the foregoing a certain amount of play has been made of a distinction between the answer which a man gives to a moral problem and the answer which in the fullest sense is his answer to the problem. But surely something cannot be a man's answer in any other sense than that of being the answer which, in fact, he gives? Yet it is just this, so it seems to me, that Hare is denying. His point is that there may be, in the grounds for the answer which I give, a body of unassimilated material, e.g. directives for which I have only some person's unexamined authority, or isolated scraps of some existing moral code. To the extent that I fail fully to appraise this material, then, although it may be operative in deciding me to answer in one way rather than another, it can be said not to have entered into my moral thinking. So that either we say that it is my answer, in the sense of being the answer I gave, but not the one which properly reflects my moral
thinking; or we say that it is my answer, in the sense that it properly reflects my thinking, but not my moral thinking. To put the point in a slightly different way, we might say that the moral problem which faces us presents us with a challenge; a challenge to define ourselves morally, i.e. to define what we really think on a moral question. And in so far as we are content to answer the problem by means of the undigested debris of other people's moral ideas, we are refusing to think properly about the moral problem and are ducking the challenge thrown out to us.

A similar kind of situation occurs in the field of literary criticism. For instance, a poem set for criticism constitutes in its way a challenge, namely a challenge to work out what it is one really thinks about the poem. Yet, since this working out is an arduous business, people for the most part content themselves with stock responses of one sort or another, or take refuge in second-hand, sometimes merely mechanical, critical devices. In such cases it seems natural to say that the criticism they are offering is not their own, that it represents an evading of the problem.

Something of this kind, at any rate, I take Hare to be saying in his Introduction to *Freedom and Reason*. In other words, the paradox or antinomy consists in saying that in morality the important thing is that the answer should be in this more restricted sense one's own, and saying simultaneously that the important thing is that the answer should be such and such. But now what light does this interpretation of Hare's paradox throw on his ethical philosophy as a whole? Considered as an attempt to resolve this paradox, does it become more intelligible as a whole?

Hare notes in the Introduction that the key to the solution of the
paradox lies in the study of moral concepts; and he suggests that the important thing to grasp about such concepts is that, when they figure in judgements (using 'judgements' in a neutral sense to stand for sentences in the indicative mood), such judgements are (a) universalisable and (b) prescriptive. They are universalisable: that is to say, if we form the judgement 'I ought to do x' or 'X is my duty', that judgement logically implies the judgement 'Everyone, in the same situation as me, ought to do x' or 'X is a duty for everyone in my situation'. And they are prescriptive: they are being misused if, when I say to myself or somebody else 'You ought to do x', I do not will or intend x to be done.

Now the point of the first term of the paradox is that under certain circumstances the answer which we in fact give to a moral problem would not represent a proper facing up to the moral problem, and therefore would not be, in the fullest sense, our answer; and because not our answer, would not be, in the fullest sense, any answer to the moral problem. On the contrary, it would be an evading of the problem. But under what circumstances would the answer we give not be an answer to the problem, in the fullest sense? The answer to this question is clear enough in general terms from what Hare says in his Introduction and what he says elsewhere in criticism of naturalism. "The naturalist" he notes in one place, "seeks to tie certain moral judgements analytically to a certain content. This really is to try to make verbal legislation do the work of moral thought." That is to say, a man is not facing up to a moral problem if, rather than make the considerable effort of working out his own thoughts, he attempts to get the moral rules of his society, as embodied in the value terms of ordinary language, to do the job for him; if he retreats into stock
responses and into an **uncritical** use of existing moral guidelines; if he is someone who is unwilling to take the trouble to arrive at an answer of his own, but wants an answer presented to him, so to speak, on a plate. What is being criticised here is not moral codes as such, but a certain attitude towards moral codes, in the light of which they become a means of escaping from the need to think out one's own position on moral questions. It is intelligible, I think, that we should say of someone who has this attitude towards moral codes, that he is thereby really abdicating responsibility for the answers he gives. We readily think this of someone who, by way of exculpating himself for some action, says that it was all in the line of business, or that he was just doing his job, or that it was what everyone was doing at the time. Thus when Hare speaks of us being free to form our own opinions on moral questions, he does not mean that we are free to think as we like, but that we are free to consider every moral judgement on its merits. There are none that we are bound slavishly to. And it is a denial of this freedom when we try and shrug off responsibility for our moral decisions on to some widely recognised moral rule, or by an appeal to the way in which people in fact behave.

So much for speaking in general terms. But what exactly is involved in considering a moral judgement on its merits? What constitutes facing up to a moral problem? What is that moral thinking by which one makes a moral principle one's own? And it is here that the features of moral judgements, to which Hare has drawn attention, their being universalisable and their being prescriptive, come into play. For if one is trying to find an answer to the problem 'What ought I to do in this situation?', whatever answer I give, since moral judgements are universalisable, will logically imply the universal judgement that
everyone in that situation ought to act in a certain way. Furthermore, since moral judgements are prescriptive, I am misusing the judgement 'Everyone ought to do x' if, when I make it, I do not will or intend everyone to do x. From the combination of these two points it follows that I am entitled to say 'I ought to do x' only if I can at the same time will that everyone in my situation should do x. If I cannot will that everyone should do x, then I cannot say 'Everyone ought to do x', and I cannot therefore say 'I ought to do x', since the latter would imply the former.

For Hare, then, moral thinking consists in trying to discover principles of action for oneself which one can also will to be principles for everyone. And here there is a possible misconception to be guarded against. Although Hare represents us as asking characteristically in moral thinking, 'What can I will that everyone should do?', it must not be thought that this question is some kind of test by which we can distinguish right moral principles from erroneous ones. Some philosophers seem to think that Hare is deducing moral principles from the purely formal features of moral language, or from those features plus certain other facts about oneself. But this he explicitly denies.

Towards the end of *Freedom and Reason* he emphasises:

"there is absolutely no content for a moral prescription that is ruled out by logic or by the definition of terms", and furthermore, that "there is no statement of fact that a moral prescription, taken singly, can be inconsistent with".

This reechoes the point made earlier:

"This argument as set out (i.e. the argument from the universalisability and prescriptivity of moral judgements), does not involve any sort of deduction of a moral judgement, or even of the negation of a moral judgement, from a factual statement about people's inclinations, interests, etc."

And he goes on,
"We are not saying to B 'You are as a matter of fact averse to this being done to you in a hypothetical case; and from this it follows logically that you ought not to do it to another! 

... The point is, rather, that because of his aversion to its being done to him in the hypothetical case, he cannot accept the singular prescription that in the hypothetical case it should be done to him; and this, because of the logic of 'ought' precludes him from accepting the moral judgement that he ought to do likewise to another in the actual case."

What I think wants to be underlined in these passages is the personal pronoun. Hare is saying of B that because of his inclinations he cannot accept the universal prescription, and therefore cannot with consistency prescribe the course of action to himself - the last 'cannot' only being the logical 'cannot'. I would argue that this process of moral thinking, which Hare describes, is not a means by which to decide what answer to a moral problem is the right one, but is a means by which to decide what one's own answer to the problem is. What he is describing, in effect, is a process of thinking by which I, as an individual, can make up my mind what I think about some moral problem; it is not directly a way by which I can establish what it is right to think. Someone else in the same position as me may find that he is willing that x should be done by everyone, where I was not willing; thus his answer to the moral problem will be different from mine. This in itself shows that this is no test of the rightness of the answer we give.

So I take it that all Hare has to say about universalisability and prescriptivity in the context of moral thinking relates, not to the discovery of the right answer to our problem, but to the discovery of what we ourselves think is the answer. The formal features of moral language have a bearing thus on the question of whether we have faced up to the difficulties of reaching a moral decision, whether the answer we give is in the fullest sense our answer. By using these features as
guides, by asking himself whether he is willing to have everyone carry out some action, a person faced with a moral problem can sort out from the mass of moral directives before him those principles which he, as an individual, can fully embrace, as opposed to those which form as yet only an incidental part of his moral environment. In any situation, there are always a certain number of moral prescriptions which we can avail ourselves of, as suiting our immediate purposes. Hare's universalisability test is designed to make moral opportunism of this kind impossible, by forcing the moral agent to make his decisions explicitly in the light of principles which are to hold for everyone, not just himself; and, moreover, in the light of principles which he really does believe in. Of course, a principle arrived at in this way is not thereby beyond criticism. In a moment we shall look at ways in which it may still be deficient.

For these reasons I connect Hare's discussion of universalisability and prescriptivity to the first term of the paradox. In their formal aspect, these features give us one means of telling whether the moral question is being faced up to or declined. And, when linked with one's own present inclinations and interests, they enable one to distinguish for oneself what one's actual moral principles are, and what, after consideration, one's real thoughts are on the problem before one. It is not necessary to suppose that the test uncovers already formed moral principles which are slumbering in the backs of our minds. It may be so. But it is more plausible to characterise it as a process by which we fashion for ourselves moral principles by which to live.

But how about the second term of the paradox, the belief that the answering of moral questions is a rational activity and that it matters what answer we give? A central objection to Hare's ethical philosophy
has been that consideration of the prescriptivity and universalisability of moral judgements cannot narrow us down to any particular set of principles; and if that is so, and the formal features of moral judgements are the only features which it is possible to isolate, then it seems as if agreement between moral agents must be a matter of chance, and that the normal state of morality must be one of pure diversity relieved, no doubt, by a certain degree of uniformity in people's inclinations. How can one say, in these circumstances, that it matters what answer we come to?

I have not so far said much about the second term of the paradox, and it is time that it was looked at more closely. Hare says two things; (a) that the answering of moral questions is, or ought to be, a rational activity, and (b) that it matters what answer we come to. He does not say explicitly that there is a right way to answer a moral question, and yet, I think, this is surely implied. I do not see how it can be maintained that it matters what I say about moral questions, unless it be maintained that there is such a thing as an answer being right and such a thing as an answer being wrong. (It is not, of course, implied that there is only one right answer, all the rest being wrong) Similarly, in Hare's saying that the answering of moral questions is a rational activity, it is surely suggested that there is such a thing as 'going wrong', in virtue of which one's final answer would be deficient in some respect. Here again the notion of an answer being right or wrong seems implied. If we accept this implication and interpret Hare as saying that it matters that our answer to a moral problem should be a right answer, not a wrong one, can we continue to give equal importance to our answer's being genuinely our own, emphasis on which consolidates the element of pure diversity in people's answers
to moral problems? In saying that our solutions to moral problems are products of rational inquiry, we seem to imply that they are something on which people should be able to agree, and therefore that agreement in morality is not just a matter of chance. This is the substance of the paradox.

We have, therefore, to ask whether it follows from the first term of the paradox that agreement between people in their moral judgements is a matter of chance, depending on whether people's inclinations happen to be more or less the same. Hare sometimes gives the impression of arguing that the formal features of moral language can carry us a certain way in moral argument, but that ultimately agreement depends on there being some kind of community of attitudes and interests. In his discussion of fanaticism, for example, he seems frequently to be saying, "We cannot argue a true fanatic out of his fanaticism, but don't worry too much because fanaticism of that sort is extremely rare". In other words, we are to draw comfort from the fact that almost everyone will be self-interested in at least a small degree. While "Ethics, the study of the logical properties of the moral words, remains morally neutral," nevertheless it is "an immensely powerful engine for producing moral agreement". And this remark is expanded on later:

"If we can show that there is a form of argument which, without assuming any antecedent moral premises, but given that people are as they are and the world as it is, will lead them (provided that they will think morally and exercise their imaginations, and will face the facts, and take pains to understand what they are saying) to agree upon certain moral principles which are conducive to the just reconciliation of conflicting interests, then we shall have done, perhaps, all that is required."

In these passages Hare seems to be saying that attention on the part of people to the logical properties of moral language does not by itself guarantee their agreeing on the prescriptions they make, but it will tend to generate agreement to the extent that people's inclinations are
not too eccentric. And this is something, no doubt, but less than is needed to meet the difficulty presented by people whose inclinations are out of the ordinary. The more careful they are to work out what it is they think on a moral question, the greater should be the discrepancy between their answer and that of the mass of people. In which case, are we to say that the former are wrong, or that both are right, or what?

My own view is that Hare, in putting stress on an actual uniformity in people's inclinations, as that which ensures agreement in moral judgements, has lost sight of his own potentially much stronger thesis, according to which uniformity of inclinations is unnecessary for people to agree. It is true that, in the simplest situation described by Hare, a man A ascertains that he thinks it right to do something to another man B by first ascertaining that, his inclinations (i.e. A's) being what they are, he is prepared that everyone should behave in the same way. But, on this simplest model, it is assumed that people's inclinations are the same. In fact, they differ a great deal. It would, consequently, be tyrannous for A to act in terms of the simplest model, in so far as what A, with his inclinations, is prepared to tolerate universally, may be intolerable to B, whose inclinations are totally different. For example, someone whose nature is aggressive and competitive may be prepared to will that everyone should fight for what he can get for himself; quite unlike what would be willed universally by a person whose nature is timid and accommodating. Some allowance must therefore be made for the difference in inclinations. And Hare suggests that the obvious way to do this is that "B has got, not to imagine himself in A's situation with his own (B's) likes and dislikes, but to imagine himself in A's situation with A's likes and dislikes".11
In this way the particularities of the individuals' likes and dislikes cancel out. What is left then are so many different mere quantities of inclination which, as quantities, can be weighed up one against the other. It is not, therefore, because the fanatic has eccentric inclinations that he remains unamenable to moral argument, but because his moral judgements do not arise from inclination at all. To that extent Hare is right to insist on the difference between moral judgements which are based on inclinations or interests and those which are based on ideals.

But if, in moral thinking, the personal character of one's inclinations is in the final analysis discounted, why should it not be discounted right at the start? Why should we not ask people to face up to their moral problems by asking themselves, 'What course of action can I prescribe universally, leaving my individual likes and dislikes out of account?'? Doubtless, this would be a difficult question to answer, and the scope for self-deception would be enormous. But there is, I believe, a more crucial objection. To ask what course of action I would prescribe, leaving my own likes and dislikes out of account, is like asking what course of action I would prescribe if I had no likes or dislikes at all. And the short answer to that question is, 'Any or none'. If I am wholly without inclinations in any direction, then I can have no motive for choosing one course of action as opposed to any other; one is as good as another. It is for this reason that, in morality, impartiality as between myself and other people is not enough. And this, it seems to me, is the force of Hare's claim that for moral argument to function fruitfully people should have inclinations of the normal kind.

"If, in becoming impartial, B became also completely dispassionate and apathetic, and moved as little by other people's interests as
by his own, there would be nothing to make him accept one moral principle rather than another."

In principle, however, the absence of strong inclinations in somebody is not, any more than the difference of inclinations is, an obstacle to agreement on moral questions. For moral thinking, in so far as it involves entering into other people's inclinations, involves entering into them in the strength which they have for others, and not treating the strength or weakness of our own inclinations as a norm for everyone. Of course, as a matter of fact, this is likely to be difficult to bring off if we have nothing comparable in one's own experience. And so, as a matter of fact, eccentricity or poverty of inclination does reduce the likelihood of us reaching general agreement on moral issues. In principle, though, so long as our moral thinking is properly carried out, differences of this sort between individuals should not make themselves felt in the conclusion.

I have stressed that inclinations, one's own as well as others', form the material out of which, with the help of the logical features of moral language, we fashion for ourselves substantial moral principles. And now we are in a better position to understand the phrase 'fashion for ourselves'. The meaning of it is 'fashion by our own efforts' or 'fashion on our own behalf', and not 'fashion our own', in the sense of principles peculiar to ourselves or principles to our own taste. For when we have said that a moral agent has to decide whether, if he imagines himself with the inclinations of other people, he could will everyone to do x, there is no reason to feel that the resultant prescription, 'Everyone ought to do x', is in any reprehensible sense founded on inclinations; any more than there is reason to feel it reprehensible that the prescription 'I ought to be considerate to others' is founded on people having inclinations which may be thwarted. In so
far as inclinations enter into moral thinking they do so, not as motive for carrying out a particular course of action, nor as the factual ground from which we derive moral conclusions, but as material to be worked. And as such, inclinations are essentially anonymous. It was earlier suggested that, if we could not derive specific moral principles from the consideration of the logic of moral language, agreement in morality must be an affair of chance, depending on whether the people concerned happen to have the same or similar inclinations; and that general agreement must depend on some general uniformity of inclinations among people as a whole. However, it is now possible to see that, on Hare's theory, this sort of uniformity of inclinations is not necessary for people to agree. For the inclinations which each man is asked to consider in reaching a decision in morality are not his own, but the inclinations of people at large.

"What circumscribes the moral prescriptions that the non-fanatic can accept is, on my theory .... the desires and inclinations of the human race."

It is this that enables Hare to characterise his ethical philosophy as, in essentials, a form of utilitarianism. In principle, therefore, whenever a moral agent sets himself to answer some moral question and, in so doing, asks himself what he can will universally, the inclinations and interests of which he takes account should be no different from those of which another person takes account; and therefore the answer which he can sincerely assent to, which is for him his answer in the fullest sense, should be the same for every moral agent. Of course, in fact it is not the same - people do differ sincerely - and one of the reasons for this, aside from variations in inclination which I have mentioned, is the difference in the quality of people's imagination.

Hare makes it perfectly clear that imagination, the capacity to
place oneself in somebody else’s shoes and to view the world from a perspective different from one’s own, is an essential element in moral thinking. A person whose powers of imagination are weak finds it hard to grasp what it would be like to be in the position of someone else; and he may, mistakenly, think that, were he in the other person’s position, he would not mind being treated in a certain way. Thus he may say to himself that it is all right for him to do something to B, whereas, if he had fully appreciated what it was to be in B’s position and to be treated in that way, he could not have willed that everyone should behave so. This kind of failure in imagination has, consequently, effects which manifest themselves in the moral principles which such a person feels able to accept. Hare acknowledges this as a difficulty:

"If the person who faces the moral decision has no imagination, then even the fact that someone can do the very same thing to him may pass him by." 14

This problem of placing oneself imaginatively in the position of someone else is particularly serious when the moral agent has to take account of inclinations which are different in certain respects from his own, or when those inclinations possess a force in excess of his own. Generally speaking, it is not differences of inclination by itself which is responsible for the different answers men give to moral questions. It is the failure to imagine what it must be like to have inclinations different from one’s own.

It is useful, I think, to consider weakness of imagination together with deficiency in, or eccentricity of, inclination. It is quite wrong, I suggest, to think these mere character abnormalities which throw Hare’s engine for producing moral agreement out of gear. If we accept the account which Hare gives of moral thinking as a kind of
exploration, and the necessity for us to sink our inclinations in the inclinations of mankind as a whole by imagining ourselves in the position of other people with their inclinations, then any personal idiosyncrasy of inclination or lack of imagination on our part must appear to us as something to be allowed for in making a moral decision. In so far as the narrowness of one's emotional life can be seen to be an obstacle to the proper answering of a moral problem, one cannot just accept the fact; one has to do something about it. The same is true of one's inability to enter sympathetically into the position of somebody else. To cultivate one's lack of imagination, for which initially one is not responsible, would be yet another way in which the moral problem would be shirked. To allow one's inclinations, one's whole emotional life, to remain undeveloped would be an evasion of a similar kind. And thus it is possible to explain the failure to agree on moral judgements, which is due to factors of inclination and imagination, in exactly the way used by Hare to explain the disagreement between those who are using 'ought' in the moral sense (i.e. universalisably and prescriptively) and those who are using 'ought' in some other sense. The disagreement is only apparent, since in reality the persons concerned are not trying to answer the same problem. But this is only partly true in the present case, as we will see.

The struggle in reaching a moral decision in some difficult matter is basically a struggle to reach a decision which will be objective, a decision which anyone in the same situation would agree with. And therefore, when one permits subjective elements to creep into one's thinking, such as the influence of one's own inclinations or one's own narrowness of sympathy, one is giving up the attempt to be objective, and ceasing to face up to the problem. Of course it may be that, with
the best will in the world, and having tried to allow for one's deficiencies in those regions, one is still affected by them. That may be the case. Perhaps we should always suspect that it is the case. But in any event we shall have intended our answer to be objective, and our failure will not represent an abandonment of the problem.

There is always the possibility of 'bad faith', when we come to answer a moral problem. It can take a number of forms, but its essence is the refusal to face up to the challenge posed by a moral problem together with the pretence, at some level or other of consciousness, that the problem is being faced. The sort of bad faith or insincerity which consists in taking advantage of one's weakness of imagination, so as to ignore the full consequences of universalising one's prescription, has no name. And there is no name either for the person who is prepared to keep his own emotional life stunted, because its cultivation would force him to recognise a much greater variety of needs in other people. (Kant's fourth example in the *Groundwork* approximates to this situation) In both these cases, there is an attempt - of course, an illusory attempt - to simplify the moral problem for one's own benefit, to make of it something better suited to oneself. To that extent they are partial and subjective. And this allows us to say that, in so far as an individual approaches the moral question in a conscientious and reflective manner, his answer should correspond to that of any other individual who does the same. So that Hare's paradox is within sight of being resolved.

Before we do this, however, a comment is worth making on this talk of 'stunted' inclinations and 'deficient' imagination. In relation to what is a man's inclination said to be stunted, his imagination deficient? It sometimes seems, from what Hare says, that he has in
mind some kind of statistical average, and that inclination and
imagination are most satisfactorily developed when they reach the point
where they are representative of the majority. But this cannot be true
of imagination at any rate. It is incumbent on a moral agent to
develop his capacity to enter sympathetically into someone else’s
position to the highest degree possible, not just to the degree which
is generally attained. And with regard to inclinations something
similar is the case. For while it is true that we form our moral
judgements on the basis of our own inclinations, considered as
representative of the inclinations of people as a whole, it does not
follow that we need aim at their being in fact representative. We may
have all sorts of misgivings about the inclinations which people are
generally found to have (Hare notes at one point that sometimes “although
we can imagine ourselves with the likes and dislikes of another person,
we are averse to doing so”16 and consequently think it not in their
interest that our moral judgements should reflect only their actual
inclinations. In other words, the pursuit of a well-rounded moral
judgement would seem to require our aiming at, not a representative set
of inclinations, but a set which we can think of as in some sense a norm
for everyone.

I remarked at the end of the previous paragraph but one that the
explication of what it means for something to be in the fullest sense
our answer to a moral problem had brought Hare’s paradox within sight of
being resolved. Let me try to say why this is so. The difficulty
raised in the Introduction to Freedom and Reason was to reconcile two,
apparently opposed, convictions: (a) that the thing that matters in
morality is that our answer to a moral problem should be our own, i.e.
should reflect what we really think morally, and (b) that the thing
that matters is that our answer should be right, in the sense at least that it could command other people's rational assent. But in asking oneself what is one's answer to a moral problem, what is one doing? Surely one is trying to find out for oneself what answer a man—any man—would give who takes into account the logical implications of his moral judgements and the consequent need, in forming such judgements, to place himself imaginatively in the position of other people, treating their likes and dislikes as his own. And, so described, what one is doing is no different from what anyone else is doing when he asks himself what his answer is. The reference to its being one's own answer signifies only that it should be the outcome of a personal coming to grips with the problem.* But then, since the problem for one moral agent is the same as for another, must not the answer which the first gives, in so far as it is a valid answer to the problem, be valid also for any other moral agent? There is, therefore, nothing in this to prevent us saying that in morality what matters is that your answer to a problem should be an answer which could command other people's rational assent. Indeed that there should be such an answer valid for everyone seems implied in the notion of an answer which anyone would give who faces up to the moral problem with complete honesty; who does not treat the facts in a cursory fashion; who brings all his capacity for sympathetic understanding to the universalising of his prescriptions; whose sympathy and imagination are the most comprehensive possible; and whose emotional life is the richest and most complete. Interpreted in these terms, the emphasis in morality on thinking for oneself has nothing

*The necessity for personal involvement in the problem lies in the view, which Hare seems to hold, that we can only judge between people's inclinations by internalising them, as it were, and then ourselves making a judgement of inclination.
relativist about it; it is perfectly compatible with the belief that certain answers to moral problems are right, and others wrong.

I think that one can say that Hare has thus resolved the paradox of how it can be a moral agent's first concern that his answer should be his answer (in the fullest sense) and at the same time his first concern that his answer should be one which can command other people's reasoned assent. The fact that an answer is his answer is not incompatible with its being one which is valid also for others; with its being the answer which anyone would give who applied himself to the problem with the same seriousness. Indeed, one can go further. The more a man applies himself to a moral problem, the more it becomes his answer, the closer it should approximate to the answer which any concerned moral agent would give. And, in short, the very notion of a right answer to a moral problem simply is the notion of the answer which a man would give, who under ideal conditions had worked the whole thing out for himself.

But this, if it gets rid of one problem, does not get rid of all. It may be true that there is nothing incompatible in a man aiming at an answer which would be perfectly his and also aiming at an answer which would be right, in so far as the two may be held to coincide. What are we to say, however, about the case where they do not coincide, where the moral agent has tried and failed to eradicate a personal bias in his approach to the moral problem? We are forced to choose, to establish some kind of hierarchy of importance. Thus the paradox which, I think, Hare successfully resolves at the level of theory, recurs in practice whenever anyone fails - as we must suspect ourselves so often of doing - adequately to think through the moral problem. Whenever that happens, the prescription which a man sees as his answer to the problem will be different from the answer he would have given under ideal conditions.
And yet we seem committed to saying that what matters in morality is that he should act on what he sees as his answer, and that what matters is that he should act on the answer which would have been his if his moral thinking had been better carried out.

This difficulty has a familiar ring to it, and it is, I suggest, none other than that which we met in the discussion of H.A. Prichard, concerning whether one's having an obligation to do something depends on the facts of one's situation or on what one takes the facts to be. Hare's version of it, of course, shows interesting differences. It presupposes, for example, that moral judgements are not statements of fact but prescriptions, and that it makes no sense to talk of a prescription being right outside of the context of the choices people do make; which are quite unlike anything that Prichard thought. Nevertheless, when Hare raises the difficulty of deciding the priority for morality of 'doing your own thing' or doing what, on better reflection, would have become your own thing, he is resurrecting, in essentials, Prichard's own dilemma and one which, so far as I can see, finds no solution within Hare's ethics.

As for that other difficulty of Prichard's, how we are to explain something's being a duty necessarily giving us a motive or reason for action, it can be seen to arise, again with differences, for Hare also. Perhaps on the surface it may not seem to, in so far as, for Hare, moral judgements or prescriptions are backed by inclination. By that I mean that, before a person decides he ought to do x, he must satisfy himself that he is prepared to have everyone do x. But there are two points that need to be made here. First, after what I have said in outlining Hare's ethics, it should be clear that the inclinations on which moral judgements are based are not necessarily one's own; they may be
inclinations which I have only imagined myself as having. So that, although the reference to inclinations may explain why people in general have a motive or reason to do x, it does not explain why I have a motive or reason to do so. Secondly, even if we say that a person who morally prescribes some action to himself must have inclination of a kind and therefore reason to do it, we should not have explained what reason a person could have to participate in morality in the first place. What reason has a person to act only in such ways as he can accept as exemplifying a principle of action for everyone? To this question, so far as I can see, Hare gives no answer.

My object in these last paragraphs has been to show that the difficulties which Prichard raised and which appear insuperable within an intuitionist framework, arise also for a philosopher like Hare who adopts seemingly a quite different set of assumptions, and appear insuperable there. There remains a question, however, whether this is a peculiarity of Hare's account of moral reasoning or whether the same deficiency is to be noted in other theories which make moral reasoning the centre of their inquiries.

Descriptivism

As an alternative to the views of R.M. Hare, I want now to consider the views of a very loosely-knit group of philosophers who have been variously referred to as 'Descriptivists', 'Neo-naturalists' and the 'Good Reasons School'. I should like to stress, however, that we are not here dealing with a theory, in the sense of a fully integrated structure of ideas, which is held by all these philosophers together, but with a certain cluster of attitudes and ideas, not all of which, and perhaps not any of which, are shared by everyone in the group,
though each person shares with each of his fellows in turn some one or other of them. Consequently, I am not going to attempt to discuss the views of the group in terms of any one representative figure, but I will be referring now to one man's views, now to another's, as will best illustrate the point I am making at the time.

Of these shared attitudes and ideas I would single out the following as being particularly characteristic: (a) a resolutely common-sense approach to the question of what takes place when people discuss moral questions among themselves; (b) a concern to argue that there are standards of rationality for moral discourse, just as there are for discourse of any other sort; (c) a sophisticated awareness of the diversity of uses to which language can be put; (d) a conviction that morality has some at least roughly determinable scope or content, and that it should be possible for the philosopher to bring out what it is; and (e) an interest in the part which morality and moral questions play in human life in general.

Let us look at each of these in more detail. First, (a). Intuitionists and emotivists, it may be said, have this in common, that they deny that we ever do engage in specifically moral argument, moral reasoning. According to the former, moral thinking properly so-called is to be found only in our immediate, in other words non-discursive, appreciation of something as our duty ("We do not," Prichard says, "come to appreciate an obligation by an argument."\(^{17}\), and what in the popular mind passes for moral thinking or reasoning is, when we come to examine it, thinking or reasoning about facts of a different order, i.e. facts that have to do with what is the case. Yet we do, surely, sometimes argue, and seemingly not always at cross-purposes, specifically about whether this or that moral judgement is right. Emotivists, for their
part, while not denying that there is moral argument in one sense, go on to speak of it in such terms as make it clear that all they have in mind is any attempt through language to influence the listener, the question of validity being left in abeyance. And yet we do make a distinction between 'getting someone to think that x' and 'giving him reason to think that x', between a successful argumentum ad hominem and a valid argument.

All this suggests that we need to look afresh at the situations in which moral judgements arise. When we do this, certain facts become apparent. The first is that people do in practice give and accept reasons for moral judgements.

"It is an obvious fact of moral discourse that we give reasons for moral claims, that these reasons are typically statements of fact, and that sometimes we can conclude that if a given factual statement F is true, then a certain moral conclusion, E, follows."^1^#*

Indeed it might be truer to say that, not only do we, in fact, give reasons where moral judgements are concerned, but it is obligatory that we should have reasons to give; that for us to confess ourselves unable to adduce reasons for a judgement would be as much as to say that it is not a moral judgement at all. This is a point made by P.H. Nowell-Smith:

"If someone says 'I happen to like doing x' it makes no sense to ask him why he likes it; for the phrase 'happen to' has just the role of indicating that he can give no reasons. But if he says 'I ought to do x' he lays himself open to a request for reasons and he must be prepared with an answer. It is because we want to make a contrast between a decision based on reasons and a decision not so based that we have these different forms of speech."^1^#*

The second fact to notice is that people distinguish between good reasons and bad, between those which are relevant to the making of a moral judgement and those which are irrelevant. What is more, this does not seem to be a matter of individuals deciding what reasons they themselves
are or are not prepared to accept. On the contrary, it is quite generally felt that there comes a point in moral discussion, where to refuse to entertain something as a reason, for or against a judgement as the case may be, is to abdicate from discussion in moral terms. And Philippa Foot is only giving her own interpretation of this when she says:

"Anyone who uses moral terms at all, whether to assert or deny a moral proposition, must abide by the rules for their use, including the rules about what shall count as evidence for or against the moral judgement concerned." 20

Now whether or not one agrees with the interpretation, the facts themselves, that people do require reasons for moral judgements and that they distinguish between good and bad reasons, seem beyond dispute. The only issue is, therefore, whether they need be explained away, on the lines laid down by either intuitionists or emotivists, or whether they can be accounted for through our vindicating the possibility of moral reasoning.

I have already noted, (b), that a concern to vindicate the possibility of moral reasoning (or, if you like, to vindicate moral discourse as a rational activity) is a common trait of the philosophers we are discussing. Generally speaking, too, they have set about it in a similar manner. They have admitted, first of all, that there is a difference between moral judgements and what would ordinarily be called statements of fact; a difference which can be brought out by saying that no moral judgement is equivalent to any such statement of fact. Secondly, although this is not true of all, 21 they have tended to admit that no statement of fact or series of such statements, properly speaking, entails a moral judgement, and that, in consequence, no moral argument is ever formally conclusive. But the nub of their case is that formal conclusiveness, in the sense with which we are familiar from
logic and mathematics, is neither the only, nor in many cases the appropriate, criterion of rationality in argument. It is lacking, for instance, to the arguments used within science, about whose rational character there has been hitherto little unease. And their suggestion is that, just as it is appropriate in logic to employ formal validity as the criterion of rational argument, and as it is generally thought to be appropriate in science to employ the criterion of empirical verifiability, so there may be an appropriate, but distinctive, criterion of rationality in the discussion of moral questions, in virtue of which certain statements of fact are good reasons for or against a given judgement. The general principle behind this is expressed as follows by S.E. Toulmin:

"We must expect that every mode of reasoning, every type of sentence, and (if one is particular) every single sentence will have its own logical criteria, § to be discovered by examining its individual, peculiar uses."

This is, of course, a negative way of arguing. It does not establish that there is a distinctively moral reasoning. But it does serve to show that the question of whether there is such a thing is not necessarily settled by pointing out, as it is correct to do, that moral judgements cannot be entailed by statements of fact.

It remains to be shown how statements of fact, without entailing moral judgements, can yet be good reasons for or against them. (c) Descriptivist philosophers have been critical on the whole of attempts to do this which involve identifying moral judgements with the performance of some one particular linguistic activity (e.g. expressing an attitude, making a prescription), and which rest on the assumption, that whatever the criteria are for the proper performing of the activity in question, the same must be the relevant criteria also for the making of a moral judgement. They have insisted, first, that moral utterances
do not fit into any one category of linguistic performance, that "there are .... dozens of things which those who employ moral words may therein be doing". They are used," Nowell-Smith says:

"To express tastes and preferences, to express decisions and choices, to criticise, grade and evaluate, to advise, admonish, warn, persuade and dissuade, to praise, encourage and reprove, to promulgate and draw attention to rules; and doubtless for other purposes also." Secondly, they have been as ready to insist that there is no linguistic activity which is peculiar to moral discourse, i.e. which can be performed by means of moral judgements and in no other way.

These two things, the awareness that moral utterances are used to perform many different functions and the perception that none of these functions is unique to moral discourse, have drawn the attention of these philosophers away from the character of the speech act being performed in moral judgements towards the word 'moral' itself. For so the argument might run: if it is impossible to show what are good reasons for moral judgements by pinning down the distinctive linguistic activity in which they figure, it may yet be possible to do so by eliciting the conditions under which any linguistic performance can be said to form part of moral discourse.

Here we touch upon something (d) which, more than anything else, is characteristic of this group of philosophers, their preoccupation with what differentiates moral judgements and moral principles and moral matters generally from judgements, principles and matters of a different kind. Their interest in this stems from the conviction that, if we could manage to bring to light the grounds on which we distinguish between what is moral and what is not moral, we should then, most likely, be in a position to say at least roughly what are good reasons for or against a judgement from the moral point of view. G.J. Warnock is
quite explicit about this:

"Investigation of the sense and scope of 'moral' is desirable not only because it seems prudent that, in moral theory, we should decide what we are talking about. It is also possible that such investigation should show what the basis is for making moral distinctions - that is, what class or range of considerations, identifying an issue as a moral issue are consequentially relevant to moral assessment of it."

In a similar spirit Philippa Foot argues that the relation between something being a moral judgement and its being backed by reasons of a certain kind is an internal one. That is to say, it is only because we conceive it against the background of a certain kind of reasons that we take it to be a moral judgement, as opposed to some other sort of judgement. 26

Now this, it might be said, is all very well. But it is one thing, surely, to argue that in fact our use of the term 'moral' is tied to the giving of a certain kind of reasons, and another altogether to argue that reasons of this kind are good reasons for a moral judgement. In the former case we are simply describing our usage of the term 'moral'; in the latter we seem to be doing something more: recommending this usage for general adoption. Does the descriptivist bid to establish what are good reasons for moral judgements not therefore involve the commission of the fallacy, that because certain reasons are 'good reasons' in the sense of being those we do give and accept, they are also 'good reasons' in the sense of being those we ought to give and accept?

It can be argued, I think, that it does not. Among philosophers taking the approach I have described it is a commonplace that our discriminating one thing from another does not take place in a void; that our whole way of seeing the world in terms of certain classes and categories is not a gratuitous parcelling up of reality in accordance
with the more conspicuous of sensible properties, but depends on "our permanent and common interests, and the forms of our social life". It follows from this that our discriminating between what is moral and what is non-moral, or between what is a good reason, morally speaking, for a judgement and what is a bad reason, has some point or purpose to it, and is not just a discriminating between what does and what does not satisfy some arbitrary set of criteria. What matters is not that our usage is to call only certain kinds of reasons for a moral judgement 'good reasons', but that the point of distinguishing between good and bad reasons in this context is such that only certain kinds of reasons could be good reasons.

In order for anyone to argue in this style, however, he needs to be able to make out a case for saying that such and such is the point, so far as our making moral distinctions is concerned. (e) And it is in this way, as a means of determining what the point of making moral distinctions is, that we are invited to consider the function which morality as a whole has in society. "Any adequate account of ethical reasoning," in the words of S.E. Toulmin,

"Must begin with an examination of the function of ethics, and of the part which ethical judgements and concepts play in our lives." The suggestion is that if we can bring out the respects in which the practice of morality makes a difference to our lives, we shall be in a position to say what the point or purpose of it is, and thus to say what must be the character of those considerations which are to carry weight in moral thinking. For example, if we think of morality, in the way that Toulmin himself does, as correlating people's feelings and behaviour so as to make the fulfilment of everyone's aims and desires as far as possible compatible, then we shall be prepared to entertain as good reasons for a moral judgement only considerations which tend to
show that this end would be furthered by everyone acting in accordance with the judgement. It is true, no doubt, that when philosophers of this group come to discuss what the function of morality is, their individual accounts seem to disclose, to put it no worse, differences of emphasis. But while one does not want to minimise this, it does seem relatively less striking than the extent of their agreement about the method to be followed, if the rationality of moral discourse is to be successfully exhibited. And it is the latter which, I believe, justifies me in considering them together in this instance.

Having thus sketched out what seem to me the main common ideas characteristic of descriptivist philosophers, I want us now to consider what conception of moral reasoning they offer, and in what way it differs from that to be found in the writings of R.M. Hare. In doing this, however, we must beware of accepting at its face value what Hare and the descriptivists themselves have to say about the differences between them, in so far as their view of the matter is more than a little coloured by the conception of moral reasoning each happens to hold. The descriptivists, for instance, have generally represented the difference between Hare and themselves as being that Hare admits the possibility of rationally resolving moral disagreement only with respect to subordinate moral principles, ultimate moral principles being matters for each individual's decision and therefore not amenable to argument; whereas they hold that moral principles are all alike subject to rational criticism, and that all disagreement over principles is resolvable by rational means. But if what I have said earlier about Hare's conception of moral reasoning is true, this seriously misstates his position. Hare is not denying the possibility of arguing about ultimate moral principles; only the possibility of arguing about
them in a deductive fashion. Hare, for his part, is inclined to mark the difference in the following way: that whereas his own method is to confine himself to the purely formal analysis of moral reasoning, the descriptivists import into their analysis considerations of content; and that they do this because they assume that all reasoning has the form of a deduction from premises to conclusion. However, as regards the first part of this, it begs the question as to what is and what is not part of the form of moral reasoning; and, as regards the second, it exaggerates, I think, the extent of the descriptivists' commitment to a deductive model in their exposition of moral reasoning. For descriptivists would not deny that moral reasoning sometimes takes the form of testing a moral judgement by following out its consequences and deciding whether they are acceptable. They differ from Hare only in holding that there is some specifiable 'moral point of view', by reference to which it can be decided whether or not the consequences are morally acceptable.

What then am I saying are the differences between Hare's conception of moral reasoning and that favoured by Toulmin, Mrs. Foot and others? I would express them in the following terms. First of all, it seems to me a consequence of what descriptivists say about moral reasoning, and it is indeed openly avowed by certain of them*, that, although there is reasoning about moral questions and moral questions in turn are defined in terms of what they are questions about, yet moral reasoning, qua reasoning, has nothing distinctive about it. It has no special

* E.g. G.J. Warnock, Contemporary Moral Philosophy, p. 76:

"There is nothing formally peculiar in, or distinctive of, arguments in morals; if there are special features here, as quite probably there are, I would suppose them to be founded in what argument in morals is about."
features of its own aside from the particular subject-matter to which it is addressed. In this respect it is unlike Hare's conception of moral reasoning. For the latter represents moral reasoning to be a quite distinct discipline of thought: a testing of practical judgements by having recourse to that which one could will universally as a properly imaginative and sensitive individual. The second difference, as I see it, is that descriptivists speak of moral reasoning as if it by itself were capable of resolving disputes about what is right or wrong; or, if in some cases this is not so, that it is because the subject-matter of moral reasoning is "somehow recalcitrant to exact, 'objective', appraisal". That is to say, there is no place in their scheme of things for moral education. This cannot be said of Hare. It is a strict corollary of the view he takes of moral reasoning that, on any specific occasion, it may only go so far towards resolving actual moral disagreements; in as much as the factors which determine what moral judgements people feel able to accept, notably imagination and sensitivity, are not such as admit of instant alteration in the course of argument. So that here, in the cultivating of a person's imagination and sensitivity, what we can call moral education, as opposed to moral reasoning, comes into its own. The last point of difference I want to stress is that the descriptivists give a decidedly intellectualist account of moral reasoning. I mean by this that they represent the forming of a moral judgement as first and foremost a theoretical problem, the problem namely of determining "which course of action is supported by the best moral reasons". As a result, what a man concludes to be right or wrong is for them not something which emerges, by a process of moral reasoning, from his own desires and interests - which, roughly speaking, is Hare's view - but is something which is determined by thought alone and which therefore imposes itself
upon his desires and interests, so to speak, from the outside. Hare's account is much more that the forming of a moral judgement is, characteristically, an activity of the whole man; in other words, that it requires he use not only his intelligence, but also, just as important, his capacity to feel things and want things.

This last point is of some importance when we raise the question of a descriptivist-type theory being able to meet the difficulties I talked about earlier in connection with Pritchard. For if what I have said about Hare's theory is true, that it does not really explain why it is we have a reason, and an overriding reason at that, to act only in ways for which a moral prescription can be offered; for a theory such as the descriptivists', which treats the rightness of an action as something quite independent of the interest one takes in it, the outlook is bleaker still. And, in fact, most descriptivists have appreciated that there is a problem here. Initially, S.E. Toulmin took the view that,

"Since the notions of 'right' and 'obligation' originate in the same situations and serve similar purposes, it is a self-contradiction (taking 'right' and 'ought' in their simplest senses) to suggest that we 'ought' to do anything but what is 'right'." To suggest that we 'ought' to do anything but what is 'right'.

But it was fairly quickly realised that this was too facile a solution. It presupposed that there is some one 'simplest' sense of words like 'right' and 'ought'. Whereas if Toulmin is correct and moral reasoning is a quite specific mode of reasoning with its own particular point, then it must be possible to raise the question whether what is 'right' or 'ought to be done' morally speaking is 'right' or 'ought to be done' from some other, perhaps more comprehensive, point of view. The crux of the matter is put by one descriptivist, K. Nielsen, as follows:

"We can always ask for a justification for taking a moral point of view at all. This is so because not all questions about conduct (about what is to be done or about what should have been done, etc.) are moral questions. Morals, though a unique mode
of reasoning, belongs to a larger mode of reasoning: practical reasoning (reasoning about conduct).”

It is therefore admitted that there is a problem about how a person who has a duty to do something necessarily has a reason or motive to do it. However - and this is the thing to notice - the way in which it is admitted, it seems to me, puts any satisfactory solution of the problem out of reach. Why do I say this? Because the plain implication of what Nielsen says is that attention to moral considerations needs to be justified by reference to considerations of a higher order, namely those of practical reasoning in general. And what can these 'higher considerations' be, except regard, disguised or undisguised, for one's own interest? In other words, we are to be shown that we have a reason to do our duty by being shown that it is in our interest to do it; and we are to be shown in this way (the further implication is clear) because it is supposed that this is the only way in which it can be done, that the only sense in which we can have a reason to do something is that of its being in our interest to do it. Now it was against just such a view as this that Prichard was reacting, and the objections he posed still seem to me to be valid: that, if the view is correct, no one ever does or could act with moral goodness, and therefore there is no difference in their rationale of acting between what we would ordinarily call a morally good person and a bad one.

In the face of these unwelcome consequences, certain of the descriptivists have found themselves wondering whether it is really true that a person, who has a duty to do something, necessarily has a reason to do it; whether it is true that moral judgements give a reason for acting to each and every person. Perhaps the situation is simply that moral judgements give reasons for acting to any properly disposed person, i.e. any person sharing the point of view from which moral
judgements are made. Philippa Foot expresses the matter thus:

"Quite generally the reason why someone choosing an A may 'be expected' to choose good A's rather than bad A's is that our criteria of goodness for any class of things are related to certain interests that someone or other has in those things. When someone shares these interests he will have reason to choose the good A's; otherwise not. Since, in the case of actions, we distinguish good and bad on account of the interest we take in the common good, someone who does not care a damn what happens to anyone but himself may truly say that he has no reason to be just. The rest of us, so long as we continue as we are, will try to impose good conduct upon such a man, saying 'you ought to be just', and there is this much truth in the idea that there are categorical imperatives in morals."

The advantage of this solution would seem to be that it gets away from the suggestion that all deliberate action is self-interested, and in consequence allows us to distinguish between the reasons on which a good person acts and those acted on by a bad one. Nevertheless, I do not see that we can rest content with it. On this view, as on the other, what one feels to be the properly moral difference between a good man and a bad man is abolished, in as much as the good man in acting morally is simply doing what he is interested in, and the bad man in acting immorally is doing what he is interested in. But do we not want to say that the difference between them is not merely a difference in the objects of their interest, but a difference in the character of their interest? How one is to explain this of course is a problem, but it is, I think, a real problem and Mrs. Foot comes nowhere near to facing it. I am no happier about a second point. Mrs. Foot acknowledges that, when it comes to directing moral judgements to other people, we do not consider what they happen to be interested in. And yet, if things are as she says they are, should we not do so? It is true that we do not usually hold a man excused from moral behaviour who says simply that he is not interested in that sort of thing. But there is more to this, surely, than mere pigheadedness on our part. If we hold
him not excused, it is, I suggest, because we think ourselves entitled to do so. And how should this be unless the fact that certain actions are right is thought to give him a reason for doing them, irrespective of what he happens to be interested in?

However, if the descriptivists are not successful in explaining the connection between our having a duty and our having a reason to do it, as regards the second problem raised by Prichard, concerning whether our having a duty has a subjective or an objective basis, they do not look to be any better placed. I say 'do not look to be', because in fact no descriptivist philosopher, so far as I am aware, seriously discusses the problem. My opinion is, therefore, based on the fact that their account of moral reasoning has a strongly 'objective' ring to it. They talk, for example, about some one or other reason being a 'good' reason for a moral judgement, in such a way as to suggest pretty clearly that its being a good reason is quite independent of whether or not it is thought by any individual to be a good reason. From which it would seem to follow that a moral judgement's having in certain circumstances the weight of good reasons behind it is a fact similarly independent of what any single individual thinks. Moreover, here and there in the writings of descriptivists this view comes to the surface, as it does in Baier's remark that, "Anyone is doing wrong who engages in non-reversible behaviour. It is irrelevant whether he knows that it is wrong or not." If I am right about this, then obviously the whole subjective aspect of obligation is going to be for them hard to explain, just as it was for the intuitionists; much more than it was, say, for Hare.

Summing up this whole chapter, I would say that I have tried to look critically at two theories of ethics which centre on the analysis
of moral reasoning, but which in many other respects pull in opposite directions. And my object in this has been to show that these theories, like their intuitionist counterparts which centre on moral experience, are incapable of dealing with certain specific problems arising out of ordinary moral thinking. I mean to suggest thereby that we entertain these problems further as a stimulus to move beyond the forms of ethical theory hitherto considered.
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2. " " " " " " p. 1
3. " " " " " " p. 2
4. " " " " " " pp. 2-3
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14. " " " " " " pp. 94-5
15. " " " " " " p. 88
16. " " " " " " p. 127
17. *Moral Obligation*, p. 9
19. *Ethics*, p. 190
21. Philippa Foot in her 1958 *Mind* article seems to argue that it has not been proved that entailment is impossible.
22. *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 83
23. G.J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, p. 35
25. Contemporary Moral Philosophy, pp. 75-6


27. S. Hampshire, Thought and Action, pp. 20-1

28. An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics, p. 223

29. " " " " " " p. 137


31. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, p. 87

32. G.J. Warnock, Contemporary Moral Philosophy, p. 76; compare also Philippa Foot's closing remarks to her 1958 Mind article

33. K. Baier, The Moral Point of View, p. 172

34. An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics, p. 162

35. K. Nielsen, Is 'Why should I be moral?' an Absurdity?, Australian Journal of Philosophy, 1959, p. 125

36. Theories of Ethics, (Ed. Philippa Foot), p. 9

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CHAPTER IV

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROBLEMS

In my discussion hitherto I have been concerned mainly with the negative implications of the problems raised by Prichard. That is to say, I have looked upon them as antinomies forcing one to go beyond theories of ethics, such as Hartmann's or Prichard's own, which centre on the analysis of moral experience, and beyond those theories also which centre on the analysis of moral reasoning. In consequence, I have stressed respects in which they resist assimilation by theories of that kind. I should like now in this chapter to consider those same problems more positively; to outline the conception of morality which, it seems to me, emerges when we make them the primary object of our attention and allow our thinking to reconstitute itself about this axis. When we find philosophers as different in their approach to ethics as Moore and Hartmann, Hare and G.J. Warnock all alike making heavy weather of the very same elements in our moral thinking, we may suspect that it is because they share some underlying assumption. By subjecting these elements to further scrutiny we may bring to light what this assumption is and put ourselves in a position to judge whether it need be retained.

I believe that it may be shown in this way that the conception of morality which thus emerges is one in which the notion of moral acting is central, as opposed to that of moral experience or moral reasoning; and that properly to understand the significance of moral experience and moral reasoning we must see them in relation to the activity of morality. I hope thereby to justify my claim made in the Introduction that the central question for the moral philosopher is, what is the nature of moral action?
My approach to the two antinomies will follow a similar pattern. In each case I will review the problem as it has been bequeathed to us by Prichard, with a brief account of the form which it takes in the writings of Hare and the Descriptivists. Secondly, I will examine in detail an article which, written in response to Prichard, sharpens the problem in an appreciable way. And finally, through criticism of the articles in question, I will introduce my own solution to the problems, and so develop the conception of morality which seems to me to be implicit in them.

For Prichard the first problem was whether our having an obligation to do something depends on the facts of our situation, independent of what we think about them, or whether it depends on what we take the facts to be. The chief difficulties attending the first alternative were (a) that we could then do our duty without being aware that we were doing it and without intending to do it; (b) that we could never be sure what our duty is; and (b\textsuperscript{1}), which follows from the latter, that we could never be said to ‘do’ our duty, in the sense in which morality is concerned with ‘doing’. But surely, to take the first two points, we do not say of someone who does his duty unawares that he has done his duty, in any morally interesting sense of ‘done his duty’; and we do sometimes, in some sense, know what we ought to do. On the other hand, if we adopt the second alternative, we find ourselves in difficulties as great. If our having an obligation depends on what we think the facts to be, then (a) we would never need to investigate the facts in deciding what our duty was; and (b) what is in fact our duty would depend on what we happened to think. But a man trying to decide what his duty is cannot, surely, dispense with an inquiry into the facts of his situation; and, in the case of duty as of anything else, how can ‘thinking make it so’? I have
already indicated that a similar dilemma presents itself to a descriptivist for whom a man's having a duty is some kind of second order fact deriving from the interests which people have within society.

However, similar difficulties arise for philosophers for whom, although they admit the possibility of moral reasoning, there is no action which is unambiguously a man's duty in any situation. For they are necessarily torn between saying that the essential thing for a moral agent is that he should have attempted to make sense of the situation for himself, and saying that the essential thing is that his moral judgement should issue from reasoning that could command other people's rational assent - using 'assent' in this context to mean not agreement, but something more akin to respect. In discussing the views of R.M. Hare, I stressed that there is a problem at the level of practice, even if, in the ideal resolution of a moral argument, the two things, personal agreement and inter-personal acceptability, would coincide. The dilemma here arises not from the notion of fact, as is the case with Frichard, but from the notion of reasoning itself. If the adequacy of a moral judgement is determined by the reasoning from which it issues, then it can be no matter of indifference whether one has thought the judgement out for oneself or not. For in the absence of personal thought, there would be no reasoning and the judgement would by that fact alone be convicted of inadequacy. Yet it is also not a matter of indifference whether one's thinking is such as to command other people's rational assent, since, when we think of reasoning, we think of something which, in principle at least, is valid for all men.

I do not think it is true that in setting up this dilemma I have used the word 'reasoning' in two senses. It might be argued, however, that there are two senses: that 'reasoning' sometimes means the actual
thinking through of a train of ideas, and sometimes the train of ideas which is thought. When one does not think for oneself, it might be said, there is no actual thinking through of ideas and, in that sense, no reasoning. But there could, nevertheless, be reasoning behind the judgement in the sense that the judgement followed from some rational sequence of ideas which could be expressed as an argument. And is it not reasoning in this sense, not someone's actual thinking through of the sequence, which we speak of as being valid for all men? So the objection might run. It is, I think, possible to contest this distinguishing of the activity of reasoning from the matter, so to say, of reasoning in general, but as regards moral reasoning, at least, both Hare and philosophers like Warnock and Philippa Foot seem to agree that it is not compressible into a formula. It is seen to require both imagination and a feeling for analogies, neither of which can be dissociated from the individual's thinking through of a moral problem. So that the objection that 'reasoning' is used in two senses seems to me, so far as moral reasoning is concerned, ill-founded.

In discussing Prichard, I observed that he offers a solution to the problem which he later came to think unsatisfactory, namely that what a man thinks his situation to be, while it cannot modify his situation as such, can and does modify the man himself and, in that way, can determine whether or not he is obliged to do something - in so far as his being obliged is a character of the man and not of his situation. I then went on to discuss the alternative solution which Prichard puts forward, which is that a man's duty is always a duty to will something and never a duty to bring something about. So that a person who wills x, thinking that it will bring about y (which is something one ought to aim at), has really no different obligation from the person who, because he thinks willing
not-\text{x} will bring about \text{y}, thinks of himself as having a duty to will not-\text{x}. What differs is only the form which willing \text{y} must take for the two people in question. However, as I pointed out, this takes care only of the difficulty arising from ignorance concerning the facts, and it does not seem possible, without parting company with Prichard, to extend it to cases of uncertainty concerning moral principles.

Prichard's second solution has not been generally noticed, and most of the subsequent discussion of the problem has started from his solution of 1932, or from that version of it which W.D. Ross gave in \textit{Foundations of Ethics}.\footnote{This is true of the article I want particularly to consider, Professor W.G. Maclagan's article \textit{On Being Sure of One's Duty}.} At the outset Maclagan notes that he is disposed to accept the Prichard-Ross view, that what a man is obliged to do depends on what he takes his situation to be, and not on what the situation in fact is. He does, however, express disquiet at two points glossed over by Ross in his rendering of the argument in favour of the subjective view. The latter asserts that it is a thought inseparable from the thought of duty that what we ought to do must be something we can do with the knowledge or at least the opinion that it is our duty.\footnote{First of all, no explanation is offered why this thought is inseparable from the thought of duty.} Secondly, it would seem to have considerable importance whether one \textit{knows} or only has the opinion (perhaps mistaken) that something is one's duty.

The real state of the case, Maclagan suggests, is "that I cannot have a duty unless I am certain, convinced, assured that it is my duty";\footnote{The reason why you cannot have a duty without being sure of it is that you cannot have a duty that you cannot choose to do.} and "the reason why you cannot have a duty without being sure of it is that you cannot have a duty that you cannot choose to do." He supports this latter claim by an extended argument which I think it best to quote at some length.
To begin with he observes that the sense of 'doing one's duty' which is of interest from a moral point of view is one in which the notion of 'choosing' is essential. And he goes on:

"The crucial question is therefore this: whether an agent, a thinking being, concerned to do his duty, can really choose to do one thing rather than another while he is still in any degree uncertain whether it really is what he ought to choose to do? It is this question, I suggest, that we should answer with a 'No'. To choose is to commit oneself, and how can one commit oneself at the very moment at which one is still wondering whether one really should? The self-commitment is a 'thoughtful' act, and the thought which is integral to it seems to me just precisely the thought, without any reservations, 'This is what I should, what morally I must, do'."

The point is re-emphasised further on:

"A man who wishes to do his duty and has asked himself, 'What, then, in particular is it?' cannot choose at all except (so to put it) \textit{sub specie debiti}. But also he cannot choose \textit{sub specie debiti} simultaneously with wondering, and finding no assured conclusion to his wondering, what the debitum is. To choose \textit{sub specie debiti} involves conviction that 'this is the debitum'. If action is to be possible for him at all he must be able to get behind any 'I think I ought' to an 'I ought' \textit{simpliciter}.'

The argument in these passages is somewhat complex, and indeed it seems to me that there is here not one argument, but a number of quite different arguments fused together. What I propose to do, therefore, is to try to separate out the different strands of argument to see whether, taken individually, they are as convincing as they are in association.

Maclagan says that a man, concerned to do his duty, cannot choose to do one thing rather than another so long as he is uncertain about what he ought to choose to do. And this claim, without doubt, has the air of a truism. But in what does the truism consist? Within the context of Maclagan's argument, a man's inability to choose to do x rather than y so long as he is uncertain about what he ought to choose to do ought to depend on the fact that he is concerned to do his duty. And yet, if we leave out that fact, if we say 'A man cannot choose to do one thing rather than another so long as he is uncertain about what he ought to choose to do',
it still does seem as if we are uttering a truism. This suggests to me that what we are assenting to in the first proposition is something quite different from what Maclagan intends us to be assenting to. This needs a little explanation. Consider for a moment the phrase 'uncertain whether it really is what he ought to choose to do'. It can mean, and Maclagan here intends it to mean, 'uncertain whether it is his duty'. But it can also be used as a synonym for 'uncertain whether to do it', and it is, I think, chiefly this sense we have in mind when we say that 'A man cannot choose to do one thing rather than another so long as he is uncertain about what he ought to choose to do' has the air of a truism. In other words, what we are assenting to is the proposition that a man cannot choose to do something so long as he is uncertain whether to do it or not. And that this is a truism needs no pressing. Maclagan's claim, however, is something different, namely that a man, concerned to do his duty, cannot choose to do something so long as he is uncertain whether it is his duty. This, far from being a truism, strikes me as positively false. An example from outside morality may make this plain. Suppose that there is a man who is trying to reach York and that he comes to an unsignposted fork in the road. Let us suppose further that he has no means (no map, for instance) by which to resolve his uncertainty about the route to take. The parallel with what Maclagan is saying about duty would be that, so long as he is concerned to get to York and so long as he cannot overcome his uncertainty about which of the roads leads to York, the man cannot choose to take one road rather than another. And that is surely absurd. The fact that he cannot resolve his uncertainty about which is the right road does not mean that he cannot resolve his uncertainty about what to do. The latter uncertainty is of a different order from the former. To resolve it a man has only to ask himself
which, on reflection, he thinks to be the right road and choose that; or, if he has absolutely no reason to prefer one to the other, he can decide on the toss of a coin. What it could never be rational to do, however, would be to sit down and take neither road, and yet Maclagan seems to be suggesting something like this in the case of duty, when he says that, if a man is concerned to do his duty and is uncertain whether something is his duty, he cannot choose to do it.

Maclagan could, indeed, have had a different argument in mind. He may have meant that, although one could of course choose to do something about which one is uncertain whether it is one's duty or not, one would not do this if one were really and truly concerned to do one's duty. The suggestion would be, in other words, that one's concern to do one's duty must be combined with a great deal of recklessness and frivolity if one were prepared to launch forth into action without being perfectly sure what one's duty is. Thus the phrase 'who is concerned to do his duty' is crucial and needs to be emphasised. But this is a very queer sort of argument. It depends on attributing to the conscientious moral agent a reluctance to commit himself to action, which is the complete reverse of what we should expect to find in a person concerned to do his duty. It would, I think, be more in character for him to be preoccupied with his duty to the point of being over-ready to act on the promptings of duty, however vague, however uncertain. The last thing we should expect is that he should prevaricate until the conviction that something is his duty is borne in upon with irresistible force. Scrupulousness of this sort is not that of a man concerned to do his duty, but that of a man who is concerned to do nothing unless it is his duty; which is a very peculiar moral attitude indeed, and not that which we would recognise as ordinary moral concern. I do not, therefore, find here any grounds for saying
that a man concerned to do his duty cannot choose to do something about which he is uncertain whether it is his duty.

Of course, there are circumstances where the charge of frivolity would be well-founded. One could not claim to be seriously concerned to do one's duty if one regularly plunged into action without taking the trouble to ponder what one's duty in the situation really was, or if one did so while the business of deciding what one's duty was was still going on. There is this much truth in Maclagan's remark that a man cannot choose _sub specie debiti_ simultaneously with wondering what the _debitum_ is, i.e. while he is still asking himself the question 'What is my duty?' and still trying to answer it. Maclagan is no doubt right to insist that the stage of wondering must be over before one can choose to do one's duty, but he goes too far in assuming that the only conclusion to the wondering process is the assurance that some action or other is one's duty. The settled thought that an action is one's duty, although without complete certainty, is just as much a conclusion as the other, to the extent that one no longer hopes that further thinking will clarify the matter more. So it is necessary to distinguish such a case, where to act in uncertainty does not betoken a lack of serious concern for one's duty (and this is the case we are discussing) from the case where a man's choice to act short-circuits the inquiry into what his duty is.

And while we are considering this point, it might be as well to add something else. It is easy to confuse our not having assurance that some particular action is our duty with our not having any idea at all about what our duty might be. But these are quite different states of mind. It is certainly true that, if we could form no conception whatever of what our duty might be, then we could not choose to do our duty. For a choice to do something must be a choice to do something specific, and
if we have nothing specific in mind as our duty we have, in consequence, nothing to choose to do. But I can be perfectly specific about what action I think is my duty; without being certain that it is my duty.

There is a great difference between thinking, without full certainty, that some particular action is one's duty and being wholly in the dark about what one's duty is. I admit that in the latter case one could not choose to do one's duty, but the considerations which are relevant there - the lack of anything specific to be the object of choice - have no application to the former case.

I think that Professor Maclagan might accept all the points made so far and yet still maintain that one cannot choose to do one's duty with respect to something of which one is not sure that it is one's duty. Of course (he might say) you can choose to do x when you are not sure that it is your duty, and even supposing that you really are concerned to do your duty. The crucial question is whether you can be said, in choosing to do x and uncertain that x is your duty, to be choosing to do your duty; and the answer is 'No'. In other words, Maclagan's argument might be, not that an uncertain person cannot make a choice to do x, but that his choice in these circumstances cannot be described as a choice to do his duty. And in that event a person cannot 'do' his duty in the sense in which morality is concerned with 'doing' your duty.

If we ask ourselves why Maclagan should want to say this, the reason would seem to lie in the very notion of action. He notes in the build up to the passages I have quoted that

"a duty must be something that you not merely can do but can choose to do: if you hold merely to the 'can do' to the exclusion of 'can choose', the so-called doing is no real doing at all but a happening or event."

In thus stressing the necessity, for a man to be said to do something, that he should be able to choose to do it, Maclagan is not, I think,
arguing that an act, properly so-called, of doing something must be preceded by a separate act of choosing to do it. The force of his insistence on 'can choose' seems to me simply to emphasise that a duty must be something you not merely can do but unconditionally can do.

Let us see what bearing this has on the case where a man thinks, but is not entirely certain, that it is his duty to do x. There is no doubt that he can do his duty in one sense, namely in the sense that it is possible that what he decides to do, in his state of uncertainty, will in fact be his duty. But it is far from being true that he unconditionally can do his duty in these circumstances, since with the best will in the world he may fail to do his duty, i.e. he may do x thinking that it is his duty, when in fact it is not. In denying that he unconditionally can do his duty, I have in mind that whether or not he does his duty depends on factors over which the agent himself has no control, specifically on whether he is right to think that x is his duty. So that the question of whether a man unconditionally can do something amounts to the question of whether he is wholly responsible for doing it or failing to do it. This allows us to see why Maclagan holds that action, in the sense in which morality is concerned with action, i.e. responsible action, is a matter of what a man unconditionally can do, and why he draws the conclusion that, in order for someone to do his duty in the required sense, he must be able to act with the assurance that what he is doing is his duty.

I observed at an earlier point that I was going to try to separate out what seem to me to be different strands in Maclagan's argument, with a view to determining how cogent they are taken individually. With respect to those that have gone before I think I have sufficiently shown that they do not really support the thesis he is putting forward, that in order to do your duty you must be sure what your duty is. But this last
argument does seem to me to retain its force under examination, in a way in which the others do not, and yet it seems to me not quite conclusive. I mean by this that the conclusion which Maclagan draws from the proposition that a man's duty must be something he unconditionally can do, viz. that a man must be able to do his duty with the assurance that it is his duty, is not the only conclusion one could draw. For Prichard, from basically similar considerations, concluded, not that we must be able to do our duty assuredly, but that our duty cannot be to do anything, in the sense of bring about some change, but only to 'set ourselves' to do something. Whether this is a genuine alternative to Maclagan's view, or a mere variation of it, may become clearer as we go on.

If, however, Maclagan's claim is correct, that in order to do your duty you must be able to be sure what your duty is, then a difficulty arises to which the only answer would seem to be the subjective theory of obligation. For an inquiry into what your duty is, where duty is conceived of as depending on the facts of your situation, can never be completely conclusive, can never yield the assurance that something is your duty, in as much as there remains always the possibility that you have overlooked some fact, or some morally relevant aspect of the facts ascertained. Therefore, if what your duty is depends on the facts of the situation, you can never do your duty, i.e. never do it with the assurance that that is what it is. But there is no such problem if your duty is conceived, on the subjectivist model, as depending, not on what the facts are, but on what you take the facts to be. For whatever doubts are supposed to hang over your command of the facts of your situation, a person is generally allowed to be sure about what it is he takes the facts to be. And in that event, since what he takes the facts to be determines what his duty is, nothing prevents him, it would appear, from being sure also about what
his duty is. In this way Maclagan's remarks about the need for assurance in doing one's duty seem to draw one inevitably towards the subjective theory of obligation.

But all the same, Maclagan notes, the subjective theory cannot be accepted in the form in which it is usually expressed, for in that form it is open to a number of damaging objections. The first is that, if, when I raise the question 'What is my duty?', the answer depends not on the facts but on what I take the facts to be, then an inquiry into the facts is beside the point; what is required is that I introspect and become aware of what it is I am thinking. But no one seriously believes that the question can be answered in this way:

"it is just not the case .... that a moral agent, wishing to know what he ought to do, settles the matter, in the last resort, by introspection, by reflecting on what he thinks."

We may be misled by the fact that a person, who is trying to decide what his duty is, may ask himself 'What do I think?' or 'What do I take the facts to be?'. But these questions are not, in this context, the signal for preoccupied self-scrutiny; I cannot answer them by a declaration of what I am thinking, of what I am taking to be the facts. They are simply the normal colloquial way of saying to oneself (or to someone else in the case of 'What do you think?') 'What is the case?'; 'What are the facts?'. And as such they have to be answered by an inquiry into the facts, the sort of inquiry which, as it was argued, can never terminate in assurance. We have to say, therefore, that, in the sense in which the question 'What do I take to be the facts?' admits of an assured answer, it cannot contribute to answering the question 'What is my duty?'; and, in the sense in which it can contribute, it does not admit of an assured answer.

The second objection which Maclagan finds to the subjective theory is that it makes the fact that I have a duty to do something to depend on
whether I think that I have a duty to do it. And the difficulty here is to explain how my thinking that something is my duty can bring it about that it is my duty, if it is not so already. On the other hand, if it is already my duty, that seems to be all there is to it; whether I happen to think that it is or not seems to make no difference. And it is hard not to feel that our failure to see how 'thinking' can constitute 'duty' is symptomatic of the irreconcilability of our ordinary conception of 'thinking' with the constituting role which the subjective theory assigns to 'thinking'.

To meet these objections Maclagan proposes that the subjective theory be fairly drastically modified. In the first place he suggests that we should reconsider an assumption which is common to proponents of both subjective and objective theories, namely that when a man asks himself 'What is my duty?' there is some already existing duty waiting around to be discovered. The truth of the matter is, in his view, that we do not so much 'discover' duties as bring them into being, and we do this through that process of inquiry and argument by which we try to answer the question 'What is my duty?'. The production of a work of art offers a kind of analogy:

"My duty is 'revealed' to me not in the sense in which the picture is revealed when you draw the curtain that hangs before it, but rather in the sense in which the picture is revealed to the painter himself as he paints; he is not copying something already 'there' (in his 'mind's eye', or anywhere else); the 'revelation' is at the same time the coming to be."

But, in that case, a further assumption, the natural complement of the other, must also be discarded. It is that the thinking involved in answering the question 'What is my duty?' is unequivocally theoretical in character, purely and simply a matter of discovering what, independently of this thinking, is the case. And it must be discarded because, if Maclagan is right that there is nothing which is the case, i.e. which is
both an answer to the question 'What is my duty?' and independent of the thinking I give to answering that question, then there is nothing to discover. "What we mistake for a purely theoretical enquiry" Maclagan says, "Is really a practical endeavour, the endeavour, so to say, to put oneself under an obligation." Maclagan means by this, I think, not that alongside theoretical thinking there is something called practical thinking, the peculiar virtue of which is that my thinking that I have a duty brings that duty into existence. At any rate he never offers an account of such practical thinking. His point seems rather to be that, while 'thinking' is from one point of view, thinking is itself something which we do, having its own proper culmination; and, specifically, that coming to an opinion, albeit uncertain, about what our duty is, has, as its practical culmination, an actual focussing, as it were, of our situation as moral beings. That is to say, we do not bring into existence for ourselves the fact of obligation; our thinking brings duty into existence only in the sense that it focusses or, as Maclagan would say, 'specifies' an already existing but indeterminate duty-consciousness.

It is time to consider whether the subjective theory, in the form in which we now have it, can surmount the objections I mentioned. Take, for example, the dilemma centring on the claim that 'thinking makes it so': either something is not my duty, in which case it is difficult to see how my thinking that it is my duty can make it to be so, or it is my duty, in which case whether I think that it is or not seems not to matter. The root of this dilemma can now be seen to lie, first of all, in the assimilation of 'having a duty' to facts of the order of, e.g. 'having a temperature'; and, secondly, in a conception of thinking as something exclusively theoretical, a conception which, it may be said, fails to do justice to its other, its practical aspect. Now it may be true that, if
I have a temperature, it cannot matter whether I think I have or not; but having a duty is, by consent, a very different sort of thing from having a temperature, why should it not be different in this respect also? Again, although thinking, in one of its aspects, has undeniably to 'follow after' the facts and cannot therefore have a role in determining what the facts are to be, it does not mean that this is true of thinking in all its aspects. This is a negative way of arguing no doubt. It does not prove the dilemma to be unreal. But it does take away from it some of its immediate plausibility by querying the adequacy of the model (of facts, of thinking) on which the dilemma is based. So that, at least with respect to his objection, the revised subjective theory comes off none too badly.

As regards the other objection, that the assurance necessary to have a duty is not assurance about what I take my duty to be but about what is my duty, the position is trickier. It could be argued, on the one hand, that the objection, as phrased, really overstates the case, that all one is entitled to say is that assurance about what I take to be my duty cannot be a source of assurance about what my duty is; and Maclagan is not suggesting this. That would leave open the possibility, that my having a duty is a matter of my being assured that I take my duty to be such and such, provided that my taking my duty to be such and such is a culmination of my endeavour to answer the question 'What is my duty?'. To put the matter as a question: cannot we say that my having a duty is the same as my being assured that I take my duty to be such and such only in so far as I have throughout sought not this assurance, but the assurance proper to the question 'What is my duty'? And is this not what the subjective theory, in its revised form, is saying? On the other hand, Maclagan himself does want to say more than this. For th
suggest that we come to have one kind of assurance regarding our duty in the course of seeking another kind of assurance, i.e. an assurance 'in' something as our duty as opposed to an assurance 'that' something is our duty, is to lend an air of fortuitousness to the whole proceeding which is for obvious reasons unwelcome. He therefore insists on two things: first,

"that when a man faces what he quite naturally calls the 'question' 'What ought I to do?' and comes, as a result, to have a duty that he would not otherwise have had, he is living, in the sense in which that can be contrasted with thinking about life, and yet also that this living is a rational process, that it is, somehow, by thinking that it is carried on"

secondly, that this thinking by which our coming to have a duty is governed is precisely that theoretical thinking usually associated with the question 'What ought I to do?'. And this does cause problems. For how can my coming to have a duty, to which assurance is necessary, be thought-governed, when assurance is so conspicuously lacking to the very thinking which governs my coming to have a duty?

There is, however, a more immediate problem. It is that, if duties have no existence prior to their coming to be in the course of thinking about what one ought to do, how can it make sense to ask oneself, and how can one's thinking be rationally carried on in terms of, the question 'What ought I to do?', i.e. 'What is it that at the present time I have a duty to do, but which I do not know to be my duty'? For the raising of that question seems to presuppose the very thing, namely that something already is my duty, which Maclagan explicitly denies. That Maclagan felt the danger of this objection is shown, I think, by his proposing that the question is not, despite appearances, about what my duty is here and now. Rather it refers, he says, to the duty that I will have come to have when the thinking process is over. In other words, the question must be understood to mean not 'What do I have as a duty here and now?'
but 'What am I going to have as a duty?'

I do not myself believe that this solution is satisfactory. There are two ways that one can take the question 'What am I going to have as a duty?' and according to neither interpretation can it fill the role which Maclagan is asking it to fill, as a control on the process by which I determine something to be my duty. One could understand it, first of all, as a piece of disengaged speculation somewhat on the lines of 'I wonder what the future might bring?'. But it is extremely difficult to see how, on that interpretation, it could have any role to play in the active working out of one's duty. I cannot be at one and the same time determining something to be my duty and waiting around to see what my duty will turn out to be, and, in so far as I am doing the latter, I am not, surely, determining my duty in any sense at all. Alternatively, we could understand 'What am I going to have as my duty?', on the model of 'Who am I going to have as my best man?', as the expression of a purely practical perplexity, the sort of perplexity which is resolved not by the finding of an answer, in the strict sense of the word, but by the reaching of a decision. There is something to be said for this. My considering a question like 'Who am I going to have as my best man?' is an integral part of the process by which I make up my mind, decide, who my best man is to be. And this is superficially similar to the way in which, according to Maclagan, my considering 'What is my duty?' is an integral part of the process by which I determine something to be my duty. But there the resemblance ends. Coming to have a duty is not at all like coming to a decision, and Maclagan certainly did not mean that our determining something to be our duty is a matter simply of deciding that it shall be our duty. He all along insists that our coming to have something as a duty depends on our having addressed ourselves **exploringly** to the question
What is my duty? And indeed our own experience tells us that we do not come to think of something as being our duty merely by deciding that it shall be so. Our duty is never 'up to us' in that sense. The only apparent result, therefore, of Maclagan's construing 'my duty' as 'the duty I am going to have' seems to be to render unintelligible his claim that the question 'What is my duty?' controls the process by which I come to have something as my duty. And this brings us back to the view criticised earlier, that the question must refer to my duty here and now, a duty independent of any thinking on my part.

How are we to get around this problem? It may be managed, I suggest, through recourse to the notion of a practical or regulatory idea. If we look at certain human activities, science, say, or art, we find that they continuously revolve around some central, highly abstract idea which is peculiar to the activity in question, and yet also too empty, as it were, to constitute a definite premise within the activity itself. We might say, for example, that there is at the heart of science the idea of an 'objective world', concerning which discoveries can be made and by reference to which scientific hypotheses are either more or less 'on target'. The scientist is not to be taken as holding that there is an objective world; the latter functions solely as an idea whose characteristic mode of presence in the thinking of the scientist gives to it the property of being scientific thinking, and not art or pure mathematics. In a similar way art can be seen as a productive activity revolving around the idea of the beautiful or eminently contemplatable object. The artist is not to be taken as believing in the possibility of such an object; but the presence in his activity of an intention directed towards such an object is what characterises it as artistic activity. So then, I am arguing that 'ought' in the question 'What ought I to do?' and 'duty' in the
question 'What is my duty' - the objective, here and now 'ought', the objective, here and now 'duty' - are not notions about which we have first to settle whether anything corresponds to them; they are, in the sense I have begun to describe, regulatory ideas which are necessarily present in moral thinking, and in the absence of which you would not have 'moral' thinking at all. In other words, what Maclagan calls the practical endeavour to put oneself under an obligation has to take place, if it takes place at all, through thinking presided over by the idea of an objective, here and now duty, and only in so far as our thinking is presided over by this idea is it genuinely an endeavour to put ourselves under an obligation. In which process, it must be insisted, we are not so much believing in the idea, i.e. believing that something is our duty, as operating with it.

This may look, at first sight, to be a distinction without a difference, and it is a distinction without a difference if the only context in which we can operate with an idea is the context of theoretical inquiry. For, in that context, to operate with an idea always is to believe that something corresponds to it. But my point is, of course, that when we address ourselves to the 'question' 'What is my duty?' we are not, despite all appearances to the contrary, engaging in theoretical inquiry. (On this matter I disagree with Maclagan, who, while he held our determining our duty to be a practical enterprise and not a theoretical inquiry, nevertheless considered that the thinking by which it is carried on is theoretical thinking.) If it is not a theoretical inquiry, however, what is it? The position, as I see it, is something like this. Every actual situation in which we find ourselves admits of being viewed in a wide variety of different ways, depending on the nature of the interest one happens to take in
it. And depending too on the nature of the interest one happens to take in it, a wide variety of different practical responses can seem appropriate to the situation. In the plural, though, the different possible interests set up a sort of cacophony of claims and counterclaims of which the moral agent could make nothing, did he not have, to set over against it, the idea of those interests being co-ordinated and brought into harmony, in such a way that there is for them all together some one practical response which is appropriate to the situation. And this idea is, I should contend, nothing other than the idea of 'my duty' in that situation. I should say, therefore, that what a man is doing when he asks himself 'What is my duty?' is thinking his way towards an ordering of all interests in the light of which it is possible to view his situation, so as to act in the way which will then, in terms of that ordering, be most appropriate to the situation in question. Moreover, my saying 'thinking his way towards an ordering of all interests' instead of 'thinking about what order there is among interests' is intended to make the point that this is not a theoretical inquiry, that the moral agent is introducing order or possible forms of order, and not discovering an order which is, so to say, 'written into' the interests already. And, since this is the position, so far from it being the case that his thinking in terms of order is only rational if he maintains that there is an order among interests already, it is not even necessary that he should maintain positively that such an order, in which all interests have been brought into harmony, is feasible. He is, we may say, simply exploring its feasibility. Summing up, therefore, I should say that a man who asks himself 'What is my duty?' is not conducting a theoretical inquiry, but exploring the feasibility of so ordering interests that some one course of action can serve, for
all of them in conjunction, as that most appropriate to his situation.

I have said enough, I think, to explain what I mean by suggesting that 'my duty' is a regulatory idea, and that, in the context of the question 'What is my duty?', we do not so much believe in the idea as operate with it. From this perspective it can be seen also, that what Maclagan speaks of as the impossibility of our having assurance that something is our duty is, properly understood, the impossibility that any actual ordering of interests should impress itself upon us as at once all-encompassing and absolutely necessary.

But there is still one last other piece of Maclagan's theory that I think we need to dismantle, if we are finally to put behind us the problems arising from the subjective and objective facets of obligation. To see what this is we must retrace our steps a little. Maclagan admits to an unsolved difficulty in his theory, namely that of how one's coming to have a duty, with the assurance which is indispensable to it (assurance 'in' one's duty), can be thought-governed, when the thinking by which this process is carried on itself always lacking in assurance. But the real objection, to my mind, only emerges when we turn this difficulty on its head. It is that I cannot have practical assurance 'in' something as my duty which would not give rise, immediately I reflect, to theoretical assurance 'that' it is my duty, if, as Maclagan insists, my being assured 'in' my duty to do something and my having a duty to do it are one and the same thing. Practical assurance and the lack of theoretical assurance are incompatible, not because lack of theoretical assurance, reflected on, puts a question mark against the 'thoughtfulness' of practical assurance, but because the existence of practical assurance and its identification with my actually having a duty, reflected on, makes it impossible that I should
continue to lack theoretical assurance.

How is Maclagan to avoid this? So far as I can see, there is only one way: he must be prepared to give up the idea that, in coming to think, uncertainly, that something is my duty, I am bringing it about that it is my duty as a matter of fact. In other words, he must give up the idea that we can have practical assurance 'in' something being our duty.

But this, to all appearances, makes the position worse than ever. For if we have no assurance, theoretical or practical, about what is our duty, then we must either have duties which we cannot 'do' in the proper sense, i.e. which we cannot do in the assurance that they are duties, or none of us have any duties at all; and Maclagan is certainly not alone in finding both these alternatives unacceptable. All the same I think he is mistaken in this, and that the second alternative, that we none of us have any duties at all, is something to be seriously considered. In saying this, the point I have in mind to make is that whether something is my duty is not a factual matter. To some extent this was foreshadowed in my earlier denial that 'What is my duty?' is a theoretical inquiry and in what I said about 'my duty' being a regulatory idea. But I was then arguing within the context of Maclagan's thesis, that my addressing myself to the question 'What is my duty?' has as its practical culmination my coming to have something as my duty. Whereas if, as I believe, the thesis must be rejected, it is not difficult to see how the case for 'my duty' being a regulatory idea is thereby greatly enhanced. For it is much easier to argue that 'my duty' is a regulatory idea if one does not have to admit that there is also a sense of 'my duty' in which it refers to an actually existing state of affairs.

We all have a natural tendency to suppose that a person 'has'
duties, in the way that he has a heart condition or an appointment with his doctor; that these are all alike matters of fact, although, no doubt, different sorts of fact. But if what I have said, specifically about 'my duty', is correct, then we must accept that, when somebody in a particular situation says to himself 'My duty is to do x', he is not stating a fact about x but is regarding x in a certain way, the way peculiar to the activity of 'exploring the feasibility of there being a duty'. It was this I was thinking of when, in the chapter on Prichard, I said that 'ought' (and so too 'duty') expresses not a character of an action which is apprehended, but how it is apprehended. And it is only in this sense that I am denying that we have duties. I am, therefore, not saying that thinking cannot rationally be directed towards the question 'What is my duty?' (though there are problems about this as we shall see), nor am I saying that we do not, on occasion, do our duty.

This last, however, may seem excessively paradoxical. For if - what seems clearly to be the purport of what I have been saying - there are no duties, how can it ever be true that someone does his duty? How can we do our duty if there are no duties to be done? There is a good deal of force in these objections, and I should perhaps say in my own defence that I am using 'do', in the expression 'do our duty', in a somewhat unusual sense, and that the possibility I am concerned to leave open is that we, on occasion, choose to do our duty. But there are, in addition, two points I want to make. First, I do not mean, in saying that, although there are no duties, we may yet choose to do our duty, only that we may intend to do our duty under the misapprehension that there are duties to be done. I take the stronger view that we can choose or intend to do our duty, while acknowledging that, in a factual
sense, there are no duties. Secondly, I want to say that, even from the point of view of ordinary moral thinking, the essential thing is seen to be whether we have chosen or intended to do our duty, and not whether we have 'in fact' done it. In an earlier chapter I drew attention to the point that we do not say of someone, who quite inadvertently does the thing we think to be his duty, that he has done his duty, in any morally interesting sense of 'doing his duty'. Nor do we say of someone, who, in doing what he thinks to be his duty, fails to do the thing we think to be his duty, that he has failed to do his duty, in any morally interesting sense of 'failing to do his duty'. And I argued that there is a sense in which, in morality, one is taken to have done that which one intended to do, and not that which one has done in fact. It is in this sense that 'doing one's duty' is still possible, in my view, even if there are no duties as a matter of fact.

All this does, of course, depend on my being right to say that we can choose or intend to do our duty while acknowledging that, in a factual sense, there are no duties. This can, I believe, be defended. What needs to be noted, however, is that the general line of argument I am developing involves reinterpreting also the concept of intending to do one's duty. There would indeed be a contradiction if I were saying that someone could acknowledge that there were no duties and, at the same time, intend to do what is his duty. But my idea is that 'intending to do one's duty' has to be understood in different terms, as, so to say, intending one's duty in action. And, as such, it both includes and stands over against what I described as 'exploring the feasibility of there being a duty', which is intending one's duty in thought. In other words, I am saying something like this: that in a sense similar to that in which the idea of 'my duty' serves as a
regulatory idea in the thinking by which I explore the feasibility of there being a duty, the intention to do my duty serves as a regulatory intention in the whole activity, both thought and action, by which I explore the feasibility of doing my duty. And just as I said that, in the context of thought, 'duty' expresses not a character of an action which is apprehended, but how it is apprehended; so, in the context of action, I am saying that 'duty' expresses not a character of an action which is intended, but how it is intended. Doing one's duty is, we may say, performing an action as a duty.

According to this view, then, a person who comes to think that x is his duty (or, more exactly, who comes to represent x to himself as his duty) has not brought it about that x is his duty; rather he has brought it about that his intending to do his duty must take the form of intending to do x. It is a determination with respect to what one must do or intend to do in order for one to be said to be doing or intending to do one's duty, and not a determination with respect to one's duty as such. Thus our exploring, in concrete terms, the feasibility of there being a duty specifies a content for the intention to do one's duty, which would otherwise remain purely formal and empty; and, correspondingly, the fact that this content becomes specified in the course of exploring the feasibility of there being a duty, gives to the intending of it the character of intending to do one's duty. Those who introduced and elaborated the subjective theory of obligation had grasped this point, that what we think makes a difference when we come to do our duty. But they went wrong, as I see it, because, thinking about duty in factual terms, they supposed that the difference in question must be one of fact, a difference, that is, in what constitutes our duty. In terms of the alternative theory I have been developing,
what I 'think' to be my duty makes a difference only in so far as it specifies the particular content which my intending to do my duty must assume in a particular situation. Equally, the proponents of the objective theory of obligation were right to insist, that we will not be intending to do our duty, unless our thinking about what to do is outward-facing, in the sense of being conducted in terms of the idea of an objective duty, a duty here and now. Their mistake lay in taking this to presuppose that there must be, as a matter of fact, a duty corresponding to this idea, and ignoring the possibility that it is a regulatory idea, present and operative in our thinking but having no embodiment apart from it. It seems to me, therefore, that the theory which I have been outlining succeeds in bringing out what is true in both sides of the subjective-objective dispute, and in such terms as show them to be not necessarily incompatible with one another.

Conversely, grappling with this problem has resulted in the building up stage by stage of a theory of morality as pre-eminently moral action. It is interesting to notice in retrospect how each successive modification of ordinary ideas about morality, which the exigencies of the problem have forced upon us (Maclagan's suggestion that duties do not exist in advance of moral thinking but are brought into being by it; my own suggestion that moral thinking is a practical exploring of the feasibility of there being anything which would answer to the regulatory idea of 'my duty'; and finally my suggestion — undercutting Maclagan's earlier one — that doing one's duty is acting in exploration of the feasibility of doing one's duty, i.e. is intending one's duty in action), has brought us closer to a conception of morality as a genuinely autonomous activity. By that I mean an activity which does not depend for its intelligibility on anything outside itself. In our ordinary
way of thinking we conceive of moral action as a response to certain situations of moral demand, which themselves exist, as we think, irrespective of whether or not anyone acts morally or is even interested in doing so. But this is to make moral action depend for its intelligibility on there being these situations of moral demand to which it is a response, rather in the way that the movements of the conductor's hands and arms depend for their intelligibility on the music and the orchestra before him. And it is then inevitable that philosophers whose concern it is to explain morality should see their task in terms of the analysis of either our experience of these demands, or the reasoning from which the demands spring. So long as we hold to a conception of moral action as non-autonomous, these must seem the only possibilities. In contrast, if we take an obviously autonomous activity such as, for example, chess, the focus of interests shifts to the activity itself; in as much as the situations with which the chess player has to contend are brought into being by, and depend upon, his own participation in the activity. Thus no one thinks to explain chess as a technique for averting situations of checkmate already impending. It is appreciated that such situations arise only within chess. A person who sets out to explain what a 'situation' is in chess, or the nature of chess strategy, must therefore explain first what it is to play chess; and then, but only then, can it be understood what 'situation' and 'strategy' signify within the context of that activity. It is in something like this sense that I am saying that morality or moral action is autonomous, using 'moral action' to mean not just actual physical performances, but the whole integrated activity of thinking and acting through which we intend our duty. My seeing something as my duty or my engaging in moral reasoning are not antecedent
conditions which, as it were, bring moral activity within my compass. They are expressions of that activity. And that is why I said, at the beginning of the chapter, that moral experience and moral reasoning cannot be understood in their proper significance apart from moral action, and why I said that the central problem for ethics is to understand the nature of moral action.

In my discussion in the pages preceding, I have come close to identifying moral thinking with thinking about duty. But I can imagine somebody, even somebody fairly sympathetic to the kind of theory I have been outlining, objecting that moral thinking is nothing like as duty-centred as that suggests. And he would be right of course. In ordinary conversation we find ourselves speaking in terms of 'duty' and 'duties' only in certain quite specific contexts, for example where we are thinking of what a man ought to do in virtue of his role in society. Thus we speak of the duties of parents, a lecturer's duties in a university department, the duty of public servants, and so on. On the other hand, moral thinking extends beyond the area of one's social role into the sphere of universal rules and into the sphere of personal ideals, in neither of which cases does it seem proper to say that one has a duty to do, or to forbear from doing, an action.

There are two replies I can make to this, and I do not think it matters which I give. The first would be that I am using the term 'duty' not in the more restricted way in which it is used in ordinary conversation, but in a way which is peculiar to ethics: as a kind of shorthand for that categorical requirement which is met with in all moral thinking, whether it deals with 'duties' in the restricted sense, or ideals, or even simple desirabilities. The alternative reply would
be for me to say that thinking about duty is, in fact, only one form which moral thinking takes; but that what I have said to be true of 'duty', namely that it is a regulatory idea, is also true _mutatis mutandis_ of ideas such as 'justice', 'the good life', and so on. My remarks about duty could then be taken not as analysing the whole of moral thinking, but rather as illustrating a programme for the analysis of moral thinking in all its forms. But in that case I should also have to say something about what it is about thinking in terms of these different ideas that makes them all forms of _moral_ thinking, and here again some mention of a common categorical element seems called for.

In this way Prichard enters our discussion once more. For the problem he tried unsuccessfully to solve, of how to explain our having a motive to do our duty in terms consistent with there being moral goodness, is simply the problem of how there can be for us a categorical requirement of the kind I have been referring to. This is not too difficult to show. Prichard would say that doing one's duty has moral goodness only in so far as the duty is done for its own sake; so that for him the problem is, how there can be a motive to do our duty such that, when we act upon it, we are doing our duty for its own sake. The problem of how a categorical requirement is possible is just the same problem seen from a different angle: how can an action be required of us as necessary in itself, as containing in itself a motive for us to do it? And if it is not quite this difficulty which is exercising Hare and the Descriptivists in their attempts to explain how moral judgements give a _reason_ for acting, that is only because - as I have indicated - they are less clear than Prichard about what conditions a satisfactory explanation must fulfill.

In Chapter Two I made a number of criticisms of Prichard's solution
to this problem, namely that we have a disinterested desire to do our duty. But what I was mostly objecting to there was his preferring a solution in terms of desire to the alternative solution, that the thought that something is a duty is itself a motive. I want now to consider an article by W.D. Falk, 'Ought' and Motivation, in which Prichard's solution is criticised more positively, and another solution proposed.

According to Falk, the great objection to Prichard's solution is that it "makes the connection between duty and motivation less close than we are wont to view it"; and this because the very form of the solution (postulating a desire on the part of human beings to do their duty) is an admission that "there is no convincing (anyone) that he has a motive except by considerations additional to those which already convince him that he has a duty". He quotes Prichard's disciple, W.D. Ross, as avowing this explicitly:

"It is clear that an act's being our duty is never the reason why we do it .... The fuller and truer answer would be .... 'I did the act because I know, or thought, it to be my duty, and because I desired to do it, as being my duty, more than I desired to do any other act'."

What Falk is objecting to is that, while Prichard's solution allows us to assert that a man who has a duty also has a motive and a motive peculiar to duty, this is made to depend not on the fact that he has a duty, but on something which is quite independent of his having a duty, namely a fact about the psychological make-up of human beings. It is therefore only because human beings are as they are, endowed with what Falk drolly calls "a singular love of complying for its own sake", that the thought that an action is a duty constitutes a motive for them to do it. And to this there are at least two objections. First of all, the claim that human beings do all have a desire of this kind
seems obviously empirical, and yet Prichard offers nothing at all in the way of empirical evidence to back his claim, apart from an attempt in passing to identify the desire in question with the 'sense of duty'.

But what if someone denies that he has such a desire, even in the shape of a sense of duty; must one not say that in that event he has no motive to do his duty? If one is going to argue that a man necessarily has a desire to do his duty, then one's claim is no longer an empirical one, since empirical evidence can only substantiate what is contingently the case. And this foreshadows the second objection. It is that, even if it were possible to prove as a matter of fact that all men have a desire to do their duty, which Prichard does not attempt, still this would only be contingently connected to the fact that men have duties and would not follow necessarily from that fact. Yet we ordinarily feel that a man's having a duty is itself all the motive or reason he needs to do it, that it follows necessarily from the fact that a man has a duty that he has at the same time a motive to do it. Prichard's solution falls short of being able to explain this.

Falk's second main point is concerned with the situation where there is a conflict between duty and something else. Prichard would have it that this is a conflict of desires, and yet it clearly cannot be resolved in the way in which such conflicts are resolved where duty is not in question, by the agent preferring whichever desire is the stronger. It cannot be so resolved just because it is of the essence of duty that it must always be acted upon. Prichard tries to get around the difficulty by stressing, where duty is involved in the conflict, the incommensurability of the objects of desire and the lack of any common quality in the light of which we could judge between them; and argues that, in consequence of this situation, one's opting
for one alternative rather than the other has not the character of a 'choice', but rather that of a decision. However juggling with the words 'choice' and 'decision' is not an answer. So far as incommensurability goes, Falk points out that it is not only with regard to duty that we encounter the lack of a common quality by which to compare objects of desire. In other such cases our resolving the conflict is not thought to require a decision 'out of the blue'. Why should it, then, in the case of duty? Well, it might be said, where duty is not concerned we can happily base our choice on which we desire more, whereas it seems inappropriate that we should make a choice between duty and something else on the basis of which we desire more.

But why should it seem inappropriate, Falk asks, except on the assumption which Prichard himself dismisses:

"that our very thinking that we ought to do some act already entails that, by comparison, we have a stronger reason in the circumstances for doing it than any other."17

In other words, Falk is saying that the way to explain the fact that we have always a reason to do our duty as opposed to anything else is not to take refuge in terms such as 'decision', which, if anything, reinforce the air of irrationality which, on Prichard's view of things, hangs over the opting to do one's duty, but to explain our having a reason to do our duty in terms of what it is to have a duty to do something. And this involves taking seriously the idea that the thought that something is a duty is itself a reason or motive to do it.

Having shown that Prichard's solution is unsatisfactory, in that it fails to tie duty and motivation sufficiently close together, Falk does not immediately propose a solution of his own. Rather he argues that there is, in our thinking on this point, an antinomy arising out of two seemingly inescapable convictions. On the one hand, we want to
say that a man who has a duty to do something has, in virtue of that fact alone, a motive or reason to do it; and, on the other hand, that, when a man has a duty, a motive still needs to be supplied. And the root of the trouble, he suggests, is a confusion in our minds between two different senses of 'ought' which are differently related to motivation.

For Frichard (and indeed for Moore and Hartmann) moral experience is conceived of first and foremost as an experience of a demand, or anyway a soliciting, whose source is outside us, as it were, and which takes no account of our personal wants and desires. Precisely because it is conceived in these terms, as something alien, it makes perfectly good sense to wonder what motive we have to respond to what we ought to do. And the only possible answers seem to be (a) that doing your duty is always, as a matter of fact, in your interest, or (b) that you do have a desire to do your duty. Falk calls this use of 'duty' or 'ought' to signify an alien requirement the external use.

He contrasts it with the internal or motivational use of 'ought'. In a great many cases, where we say "Ought I to do x?", we could have said "Have I a motive to do x?" without change of sense. What needs to be noted, however, is that you do not say "I ought to do x" where what you mean is "I have a motive to do x" in the sense of one motive among others, but only where the motive in question is the overriding one or your motive overall. Although I can have a motive to do x and also a motive not to do x, we cannot express this by saying that I motivationally 'ought' to do it in one sense and motivationally 'ought not' to do it in another. Thus we tend to use the 'ought' of motivation only in contexts where it is safely established what a man's primary end is, as when we say to someone, whom we know to be looking for the Zoo, that he
ought to go in such and such a direction. But, in addition, we sometimes find ourselves wondering "What ought I to do?" where we have no particular end in mind, and here we seem to be thinking, admittedly in an ill-defined way, of some end which we have, as it were, dispositionally, merely in virtue of being the kind of people we are. We are asking, in effect, "What is that act which, if per impossible I knew all the relevant facts about the world and about my own nature, I should realise I had most motive to do?". That 'ought' in this use (which Falk calls the purely formal motivational use) provides us with a conclusive reason or motive to act follows from the terms in which it has been defined; for a conclusive reason just is

"one with regard to which no further question could be asked: which was thought rationally unavoidable on account of the act itself (or on account of some other end thought rationally unavoidable in itself), and rationally, in the given circumstances, unavoidably stronger than all opposing motives."18

Now it is worth noting that when we say of a man that he ought to do something, using the purely formal motivational 'ought', it does not make sense at all to ask whether he has a motive to do it. This is because such a use of 'ought' itself signifies that he has a motive and moreover a conclusive motive. And it is Falk's contention that the apparent antinomy regarding duty and motive, which arises from our wanting to say simultaneously that, if a man has a duty, he thereby necessarily has a motive to do it, and that, although a man has a duty, a motive to do it has still to be provided, is the result of our confusing together this purely formal motivational use of 'ought' with the external use referred to earlier. That is to say, we operate with two, incompatible conceptions of 'ought' with regard to one of which, but not the other, it makes sense to ask whether that which we ought to do is something we also have a motive to do. We are thus led to feel
that, when we have a duty, it yet remains to be shown in what way we have a motive; but to feel also dissatisfied unless it can be shown that our having a motive follows necessarily from the fact that we have a duty. Under these circumstances, when anyone asks to be shown what motive he has to do his duty,

"on an externalist view of 'ought' his request is legitimate and in need of some factual answer; on a purely formal motivation view his very request is absurd; and where both views are confusedly held no answer can satisfy."19

What are we to do about this? Well first, Falk thinks, we must recognise that we are here confusing two different uses of 'ought', and secondly, since our moral thinking cannot simply accommodate itself to duality in this respect, we must make up our minds which of these two uses of 'ought' best corresponds with our intentions in using moral judgements. And Falk indicates in closing that, in his own conviction, it is the 'ought' of purely formal motivation:

"nor could a person, aware of a capacity of reasoned choice and intent on using it, easily agree to a use of these words ('ought' and 'duty') for any demand on him that still left him to ask whether he also had a formally sufficient reason for doing the act; and the only use of them free from this shortcoming would be for the very fact itself that he had such a reason."20

Falk's solution to the problem of how a person who has a duty necessarily has a motive to do it is, therefore, to interpret 'duty' and 'ought' in motivational terms, as themselves signifying that which a man has most motive to do. And this is satisfactory up to a point. But I do not think it gets to the heart of Prichard's difficulty, which is to explain how it is that a man has a motive to do his duty in terms which are consistent with his acting with moral goodness.

Let me say why I think this. According to Falk, a man who asks himself 'What is my duty?' or 'What ought I to do?' is, in effect, asking 'What is that act which, given my own nature and my circumstances,
I have ultimately most motive to do?'. And, as he is at pains to make clear, this does not mean 'What act am I *occurrently* most motivated to do?', but rather 'What act have I *dispositionally* most motive to do?'. Indeed he says of the motivational 'ought' that it expresses

"nothing other than a certain relation between a person's dispositional and occurrent motives: that though occurrently he had no impulse or desire to do an act or none sufficiently strong, dispositionally he was under an effective and over-riding compulsion to do it".

From this it appears that a person's having an ultimately over-riding motive to do something is, in Falk's view, a state of affairs, and that this state of affairs is, so to speak, a function of the person's own nature and the circumstances in which he is placed. (The parallel with the objective view of duty is obvious enough) Furthermore, because a person's having this sort of motive is a state of affairs, it seems to follow that the thinking prompted by the question 'What have I (dispositionally) most motive to do?' would be theoretical thinking, i.e. thinking directed to discovering what it is he has (dispositionally) most motive to do.

Now I want to say that, if a man is to act with moral goodness, his motive with which he does his duty cannot be a motive which is 'discovered' in the way Falk is suggesting, as something already present dispositionally. For to discover a motive in this sense can only mean to discover that doing one's duty is in one's interest. And if one's only motive for doing one's duty is that it is in one's interest, one is not doing it for its own sake, and thus not acting with moral goodness.

Take these points in reverse order, and first the point that, if one's only motive for doing one's duty is that it is in one's interest, one is not doing it for its own sake. I think we might feel about this
that really it is only an objection in the context of an externalist view of 'duty'; that since Falk has defined one's having a duty in terms of one having ultimately an over-riding motive to do something, the disjunction - acting from duty or acting from interest - is not a genuine disjunction; and that therefore, when we do our duty from the thought that it is in our interest, we are just as truly doing it for its own sake. If we do think this, however, we must be running together two things which, it seems to me, are not the same: my having a motive to do something and its being in my interest to do it. My having a motive to do something is a matter simply of my having an interest of some kind in doing it, and this interest may be an interest on my part in the thing itself (in which case I will be doing it for its own sake), or it may be the fact that it is in my interest. Since there are these two possibilities, I cannot agree that there is no distinction, on Falk's view, between doing one's duty for its own sake and doing it from the thought that it is in one's interest.

The other point I made was that to discover a motive to do one's duty, in the sense of a motive which dispositionally one already has, can only mean to discover that doing one's duty is in one's interest. This is because, of the two senses of 'having a motive' which I mentioned (my taking an interest in the thing itself, and its being in my interest), only the latter sense is such that I could properly be said to discover a motive already existing. Although we sometimes speak in the former sense of 'discovering an interest', this has always the connotation of awakening an interest or bringing a motive into being. I hasten to add, however, that this 'bringing into being' need not be automatically assumed to mean 'bringing into being the fact that one has a motive'. The point of this caveat will become clear in a
moment.

But surely, it will be said, one can discover oneself in the act of taking an interest in something? One can, of course. But then, I should argue, to discover that one is taking an interest in something is not to discover that one has a motive, it is to discover only that one thinks of oneself as having a motive, and that would seem to be a quite different thing. But is it? Do we not sometimes say of a person that he has a motive to do x, when all we mean is that he is \textit{occurrently} motivated towards doing x? And is not a person \textit{occurrently} motivated towards doing x when he thinks of himself as having a motive to do it? It could be argued no doubt that what we have to contend with here are two senses of 'having a motive': one being such that, when a person thinks that he has a motive, it remains an open question whether he has a motive or not, and the other such that, when he thinks that he has a motive, he thereby has a motive. But even if that is so, one ought to be prepared to say something about how the two senses are related to each other, and that presents a problem. Despite what I said about us ascribing a motive to someone who is \textit{occurrently} motivated to do something, I do not believe that the difference in the two senses of 'having a motive' is simply that between a person's \textit{occurrent} and \textit{dispositional} motives. For if that was what was involved, then whenever we think ourselves to have, dispositionally, a motive to do something, we should necessarily have an \textit{occurrent} motive to do it. And that, plainly, is not true. It makes perfectly good sense for someone to say that, though dispositionally he has a motive to do something, yet he has \textit{occurrently} no motive to do it.

The truth of the matter, as I see it, is that we have here a problem identical to that which we met with earlier in connection with
duty. We struggled then trying to explain how our thinking that we have a duty can entail our actually having a duty; and here we find ourselves struggling in the same way to explain how our thinking that we have a motive can entail our actually having a motive. As the proponents of the subjective view of duty toyed with the idea of there being two senses of 'having a duty', so here we seem to be toying with the idea of there being, similarly, two senses of 'having a motive'. But that is not the solution in this case, I suggest, any more than it was in the other. The only real solution lies in challenging the assumption that questions about motive are questions about fact.

How this might intelligibly be done should, I believe, be clear enough after what I have said about duty. That is to say, we must think of a person who asks himself 'What ought I to do?', in the motivational sense, not as asking a theoretical question about an already existing state of affairs or even about a state of affairs which might at some future date be brought into existence, but as actively bringing into focus something as a motive. And this in turn, on the pattern of what I said about duty, must be seen as a determination not with respect to motive as such (he does not thereby bring about the fact that he has a motive), but with respect to that which he must do in order for him to be acting sensibly. Falk's purely formal motivational 'ought', in other words, is just as much a regulatory idea as 'duty' itself is.

Perhaps it is not so very surprising that I should say this. For the terms in which I earlier characterised the idea of 'duty', as the idea of there being some one course of action which could serve for all the interests one could take in a situation as that most appropriate to the situation, already foreshadowed the assimilation of duty and
Interests (not, of course, duty and interest) which I am proposing here. In the same way, Falk's thinking of motivation in factual terms seems to me to follow inevitably from his first thinking of duty in factual terms. But the point I have tried to make in thus speaking about motive, and about Falk's views in particular, is that, aside from the difficulties which arise from thinking of duty in factual terms, there is a quite special difficulty which is inherent in thinking of our motive to do our duty in factual terms. It is that we cannot then give an account of what it is to take an interest in something, and specifically of what it is to take an interest in doing one's duty. From which it follows that we cannot explain how a person can sensibly do his duty for its own sake.

Now it is the merit of the view I have been putting forward that it can explain this. For while, on most theories of ethics, a person can find himself with a duty to do something although he takes not the least interest in doing his duty, it is a peculiarity of my own view that for a person to think of himself as having a duty to do something specific, he must in some sense already be taking an interest in doing his duty. This is because, on my view, his coming to think of something specific as his duty is itself an integral part of moral activity, is itself a fruit of his active engagement in doing his duty. A person who was in no sense at all interested in doing his duty would never have got to the point where something presents itself to him as his duty. That is the first point. But the second point is crucial. In saying that, for a person to think of something specific as his duty, he must already be taking an interest in his duty, I do not mean that he must therein have a motive. All I am saying is that he must see himself as having a motive. And the significance of that is that, so long as he
seems himself as having a motive to do his duty, it will be sensible for
him to do it. Whether or not he is doing his duty for its own sake
will then depend on whether his taking himself to have a motive to do
his duty is a matter of his taking the doing of his duty to be of
interest in itself, or is simply a matter of his taking it to be in his
interest. It is in this way that we can explain how it can be sensible
to do one's duty (and it is this that people who ask for a motive are
worried about), in terms which allow of duty being done for its own
sake.

I am conscious of having expressed in this chapter views by no
means easy to grasp, since they involve a considerable departing from
our ordinary way of thinking in relation to duty and to motive; and of
having done so, moreover, at much shorter length than the matter really
requires. I hope to have done enough, however, to make clear the kind
of solution to our problems which they seem to me to call for, and to
some extent anyway the kind of approach to ethics it carries with it.
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References

All references to W.G. Maclagan in this chapter are to his article *On Being Sure of One's Duty* (Philosophical Quarterly, 1951), and all those to W.D. Falk are to his article 'Ought' and Motivation (Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1947-8).

1. pp. 161-3
2. Philosophical Quarterly, 1951
3. Foundations of Ethics, p. 163
4. Maclagan, p. 36
5. " p. 37
6. " p. 37
7. " p. 37
8. " p. 38
9. " p. 42
10. " p. 42
11. " p. 43 *My italics*
12. " p. 38
13. Falk, p. 121
14. " pp. 118-9
15. Foundations of Ethics, pp. 225-7
16. Falk, p. 126
17. " p. 124
18. " p. 135
19. " p. 138
20. " p. 138
21. " p. 129
The discussion in this final chapter falls into two sections. The first is taken up with a relatively detailed exposition and criticism of the views of Professor Michael Oakeshott as expressed in his book *Rationalism in Politics*. The second deals in an exploratory fashion with the question of how far the conception of morality as an autonomous activity is in keeping with its also being a rational activity. I do not think I have to apologise for the latter, but something should perhaps be said about why Professor Oakeshott's views are worth considering at this point.

I have two main objects in mind in introducing his views into the discussion. The first is to clarify by contrast what I mean by saying that morality is an activity. I have been limited in the extent to which I have been able to do this in previous chapters by the fact that the philosophers being considered were those whose starting point in ethics lay furthest from my own. In relation to them, it seemed sufficient to urge, without much elaboration, that morality is first and foremost an activity, rather than an experience of certain kinds of objects or a certain special way of reasoning. Oakeshott presents a different problem. For he is as insistent as I could be that morality is an activity. If, then, there is a difference between our two views - and I think there is - it must be a difference in what we mean by the claim that morality is an activity. And this seems worth pursuing. But secondly, though I shall argue that Oakeshott does not succeed in the end in showing morality to be an activity, in that he fails to show what it is in individual moral performances that makes
them to be part of the one activity, I want to go on to say that his views, when taken in conjunction with my own, offer us what is at once an intelligible and satisfactorily concrete account of morality as an activity. And this does help to bring the thesis a little closer to ordinary experience than has been done hitherto.

In referring to morality as an activity Oakeshott has something more in mind than the simple fact that morality belongs to the active, practical side of life as opposed to the receptive, theoretical side. For one thing, fidgeting, fixing someone with a stare, writing one’s name and whistling tunes all feature human agency, all show man in an attitude of doing; but they are not activities in the sense in which, for Oakeshott, morality (or science or history) is an activity. They may be, indeed, instances of some activity, different forms which the activity takes on particular occasions, but they are not themselves distinct activities. We may be tempted to say that, for Oakeshott, an activity is characterised by skill. And this is true. But then the notion of ‘skill’ is no more transparent here than that of ‘activity’ itself. Certainly there is no imaginable skill required to fidget, but this is not true of writing one’s name, for example, or whistling tunes, both of which for their accomplishment draw upon skills which have to be acquired. So while admitting that Oakeshott’s use of terms such as ‘activity’ and ‘skill’ is fairly elastic, we must say, I think, that, in the sense in which for him an activity is characterised by skill, the skill in question is not some single isolated capacity but a connected web of capacities (not the joiner’s management of his hammer, but his management of all the aspects of his work); and these are somehow distinctive and self-contained. One of the things, therefore, that Oakeshott intends in saying that morality is an activity is that,
in the sense suggested, it involves skill. And indeed he says as much: "Moral conduct is art, not nature; it is the exercise of an acquired skill."\(^1\)

But what is the nature of this skill? In one place he says, "The moral skill in practical activity, the *ars bene beatique vivendi*, is knowing how to behave in relation to selves ingeniously recognised as such",\(^2\) i.e. recognised not just as means to our own ends. Elsewhere he speaks of it in more general terms as "the skill not of desiring, but of approving and of doing what is approved".\(^3\) It involves, he says, the "knowledge of how to manage the activity of desiring, of how to behave."\(^4\)

However, the point I want to stress here is less the actual character of the skill embodied in morality, and more the fact that, according to Oakeshott, in weighing up moral considerations and coming to a decision about what one ought to do, in making moral appraisals, in the performance of one's duty, in the visualising and striving to live up to ideals, one is exercising skill. For to speak of 'skill' in this connection seems strangely out of place.

Let us look at this point more closely. I have said that to speak of 'skill' in connection with morality seems strangely out of place. Now that is not strictly true. People would, I think, concede that there is a sort of skill involved in picking one's way through a complexity of moral considerations; and they would agree also, probably, that skill can be exhibited in the tact and discriminating delicacy with which one carries out one's obligations. But the skill envisaged is always, I should say, skill in eliciting what should be done (be that knowledge explicit or otherwise), and does not belong to the doing as such. That is to say, while we might be happy to say that someone who had carried out a painful duty with sensitivity and
tact had therein shown skill, the skill we should have in mind would be skill in discerning, in the very doing of his duty, that which his duty required of him. But that he did carry out that which he discerned to be his duty seems less a matter of skill and more a matter of goodwill. One can imagine, can one not, an individual who sees clearly enough what he should do and yet neglects, for one reason or another, to do it? Now, if doing that which you see to be your duty is exercising skill, then it would appear that not to do what you see to be your duty is, conversely, deficiency of skill. But we do not think of saying of someone in this situation that he is inexpert in morality, since our saying that he is inexpert would tend to withdraw his conduct from blame; we attribute to him instead weakness of will or ill will. That is, we speak of him as not having done that which he knew well how to do.

We may, it is true, say of such a person that he does not know how to behave, but in this context not knowing how to behave means something different from being gauche or morally imperceptive: it is explicit moral condemnation. This is the point which Professor W.H. Walsh seems to be making in his article Moral Authority and Moral Choice. He admits that there is an element of skill in morality: "Morality is a matter of skill as well as will"; but he nevertheless has this qualification to make:

"The moral agent, on my view of the matter, is not only applying a certain sort of know-how; he must also be schooled to persist in its application when it is against his immediate inclinations."

A similar point is made in S.E. Toulmin's article Knowledge of Right and Wrong, where he says,

"'Knowing what one ought to do' is not so much 'learning' or 'information' as savoir-faire, the mark of the 'well-behaved' or 'considerate', of the 'man of principle', not the expert."

However, the Toulmin passage can be seen to incorporate two contrasts
(and they do not coincide, I think), between 'savoir-faire' and
'information' - i.e. knowing how and knowing that - and, in the latter
half, between the expert and the man of principle - between skill and
what may be called fortitude. It is certainly something like fortitude
which Walsh has in mind when he says that the moral agent "must be
schooled to persist in its application (i.e. the application of moral
'skill') when it is against his immediate inclinations". But the point
both are trying to make is plain enough, that it is not enough to give
an account of morality in terms of skill, since a man can always have a
skill but not bring it into play. For example, although a man is a good
flautist, he may on occasion, through carelessness or spite, play the
flute badly. His choosing to play it badly does not reflect on his
competence as a flautist. Would it not be the same, if morality were,
like playing the flute, a skill? In other words, would skill in
morality not be consistent with neglect of the behaviour which one's
skill intimates? But since for Oakeshott skill in morality is
identified with that knowing how to behave which is the essence of the
moral accomplishment, the good man, we should then be forced to conclude
that neglect of one's moral obligations could go along with being a good
man. And that, clearly, is absurd.

However, this particular absurdity is one which Oakeshott gives us
no reason to think he embraces. In opposition to the view that skill
in morality is consistent with not doing that which you see to be your
duty, he holds that not to do what you see to be your duty would in
itself convict you of deficiency of skill in morality, deficiency of
knowledge of how to behave. For what distinguishes morality as a
skill from other skills is that it is a skill, not in some form of
acting, but in acting as such. The flautist's decision not to play
his flute properly is not something which calls his knowledge of how to play the flute in question. But a man's not acting according to his knowledge of how to behave does call in question his knowledge of how to behave, in as much as his acting thus falls within the scope of his knowledge of how to behave. It is no deficiency in his skill that the flautist may opt occasionally to play badly, but it is a deficiency in the moral agent (and therefore argues lack of skill) that he opts to behave badly. A good flautist is one who could play well if he chose. A good man is not a man who could behave well if he chose, but a man who could do so and who does, in fact, choose to do so. The difficulty we experience in understanding how neglect of an acknowledged duty can be a case of ineptness springs, it might be said, from our failing to grasp the respect in which skill in morality differs from other skills; the difference, at bottom, being one of comprehensiveness. Each and every occasion is an opportunity for the exercise of moral capability. One cannot with regard to morality, though one can with regard to other things, detach the decision to practise the skill from the practice of the skill.

Moreover, it can be shown, I think, that this strict separation of discerning what is right to be done and the doing it, the former involving skill and the latter mere will, is unsatisfactory. For if it applies to morality, then it applies to any activity whatsoever, and it is then arguable that we should have to concede that there is no such thing as skill in action at all. For of any activity it can be said that the skill lies in the preliminaries, in the working out of what is to be done, and not in the doing as such. And it may be wondered whether in analysing action in this way we do not illegitimately dissemble thought and action to the point of making the idea of action
itself unintelligible.

That this is Oakeshott's general line of criticism can be demonstrated from many places in his writings, most notably from his essay *Rational Conduct*. There he is concerned to consider and to find fault with a particular conception of what it is makes behaviour rational. (It is worth noting, in this connection, that Oakeshott's use of the word 'skill' has a lot in common with his use of the word 'rationality': conduct which exhibits rationality is, effectively, conduct which exhibits skill.) According to this conception, as he outlines it,

"The rationality of conduct .... springs from something that we do before we act; and activity is 'rational' on account of its being generated in a certain manner."

In other words, such rationality (or skill) as we find in action belongs in the first instance to the deciding what is to be done, and only by contagion, as it were, to the deciding to do it. And it is true that once one has sundered rational (i.e. skilful) behaviour into two stages, in the first of which action is meditated upon and planned and in the second carried out, rationality seems inevitably to gravitate towards the first, the meditative, stage, while the executive stage becomes (in one's theory at least) increasingly a matter of pure unimpeded choice, a question of 'Shall I do it or not?'. But the retort to this is to deny that we ever are faced by that question on its own; without, that is to say, the accompanying question 'Can I, do I know how to, do it?'. Of course, in most cases the answer to the second question is taken for granted in asking the first. You do not, as a rule, trouble to ask yourself 'Shall I do this?' unless it is something you think you know how to do. The second question cannot, however, be dispensed with. For it is one thing to know what is to be done and another to know how to do it. Even a novice golfer may know how, in theory, a particular
shot ought to be played, but that is not to say he knows hot to play it, in the sense of being able to co-ordinate his movements in the prescribed way. Knowing what needs to be done can go along with an inability to do it. And this forces us to recognise that, besides the skill involved in deciding what to do, there is a skill which is peculiar to executing an action; which, be it said, is no great discovery, but what people, for want of a theory, for the most part think. It is in this way that I interpret Oakeshott’s remarks in the essay Rationalism in Politics, where he says that,

"Every science, every art, every practical activity requiring skill of any sort, indeed every human activity whatsoever, involves knowledge";

and that,

"Universally, this knowledge is of two sorts, both of which are always involved in any actual activity .... The first sort of knowledge I will call technical knowledge .... the second sort .... practical."

However, there are certain obscurities in what he says. He associates 'technical knowledge' with knowledge of rules or principles, and 'practical knowledge' with knowledge of how to apply the rules, in a way that does not make clear that this knowledge of how to apply the rules is an altogether different thing from the knowledge of how they are to be applied. That is, he seems at times to be intending the same distinction as that of Professor Gilbert Ryle between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. This would seem to be the force of the passage in which he speaks of practical knowledge as involving "the sort of judgement which tells (the agent) when his technique is leading him astray". But the dominant theme is rather that of the following passage where, speaking of the fine arts, he says,

"A high degree of technical knowledge, even where it is both subtle and ready, is one thing; the ability to create a work of art, the ability to create something with real musical qualities, the ability to write a great sonnet, is another."
or where he remarks of practical principles that "a complete mastery of these principles may exist alongside a complete inability to pursue the activity to which they refer". It is then, I suggest, the ability to pursue an activity which Oakeshott has in the forefront of his mind when he speaks of practical knowledge, and not simply that refinement of technical knowledge which we call taste or connoisseurship; and in so far as he does refer to practical knowledge in terms of the latter, he must be considered to be importing confusion into his account.

Now a question arises about the relationship of practical knowledge to technical knowledge. On the face of it, it would seem that practical knowledge is acquired by the habitually carrying out the prescriptions of technical knowledge. We start, that is to say, with technical knowledge, with the knowledge of the way in which something is to be done; then, when we come to do it, our efforts are frustrated, initially at least, by our never having done this kind of thing before and therefore by our lack of practical knowledge or facility; and this last comes only with practice in doing the thing in question. The apparent sequence is, first, technical knowledge, by which an action is projected; second, practice; and third, practical knowledge.

According to this view, technical knowledge clearly enjoys the primacy. But, as Oakeshott points out, this account glosses over certain things. For instance, nothing at all is said as to the character of the action which is to be performed. The implication is that it does not much matter what kind of action is projected, whether it be lifting one's hand to one's face or dealing a pack of cards. But is it at all clear that one could decide to deal a pack of cards if one did not have some prior acquaintance with card games, and the function of dealing in card play? Is not the formulation of such a project intelligible only
within the context of our knowing about cards and about the uses to which cards are put? And how should we have that knowledge, unless from our own participation, or from the participation of those around us, in card games of some kind? Practice, and therefore practical knowledge, must precede technical knowledge.

No doubt, looked at from the point of view of the individual, technical knowledge will seem to come first, in so far as most of us gradually gain proficiency in an activity in the early stages by formulating simple projects in advance and then carrying them out. But the point to bear in mind, Oakeshott would say, is that, in formulating such projects and in deciding upon the best means to carry them out, we have already some knowledge to go on, namely our knowledge of the way in which the activity is carried on, not by ourselves of course but by other people. This knowledge that we have is not itself practical knowledge; but practical knowledge, as exhibited by other people participating in the activity, is what it is knowledge of. And it is in this sense that Oakeshott holds technical knowledge to presuppose practical knowledge. There is, he freely admits, "a power of considering abstract propositions about conduct" - this, indeed, is the basis of the view that skill or rationality in action belongs in the first instance to the fixing of ends and selection of means - but he continues:

"This activity is not something which can exist in advance of conduct; it is the result of reflection upon conduct, the creature of a subsequent analysis of conduct."

So far from it being the case that practical knowledge develops in the course of pursuing ends previously determined, according to Oakeshott

"there is in fact no way of determining an end for an activity in advance of the activity itself; and if there were, the spring of the activity would still remain in knowing how to act in pursuit of that end and not in the mere fact of having formulated an end to pursue."
And he sums up:

"It is necessary to possess a knowledge of how to go about it (that is, a project within an activity) before you embark on the same sort of knowledge in order to formulate a project."

Why, though, is it so important to get right the priority as between technical knowledge and practical knowledge? Well, it might be said, one needs first to grasp the fact that technical knowledge is not the knowledge that constitutes an activity, but rather is knowledge at one remove from the latter, in order to appreciate the need, in explaining an activity, to go beyond the recounting of the end or ends pursued within it. Conversely, what sometimes passes for an account of an activity in terms of its ends is, if Oakeshott is correct, merely an abstract of practice as it has been within the activity so far. (This, presumably, would be the criticism to be made of the Descriptivists' account of morality.) But if Oakeshott thus rejects as inadequate any account of an activity in terms of its end or ends, he is equally opposed to accounts which would define an activity in terms of the questions proper to it:

"It is, of course, not impossible to formulate certain principles which may seem to give precise definition to the kind of question a particular sort of activity is concerned with; but such principles are derived from the activity and not the activity from the principles."

Part, then, of what Oakeshott is saying, in his claim that morality is an activity, is that you cannot give an adequate account of it in terms of the end or ends pursued within it, nor in terms of the sort of questions with which it deals. And this is something. But there still remains the question, how, if not in these ways, is an activity to be defined? Wherein lies its coherence?

Professor Oakeshott has, in fact, quite a lot to say on this
score, and the account which he gives, particularly as applied to morality, I have an interest in examining closely, since it seems to me not wholly satisfactory. The general outlines are sketched in first. An activity is a certain way of acting; it consists, he tells us, "in knowing how to tackle problems of a certain sort." But more precisely - and it is in this more precise sense that the term is applied to morality, science, art - it is a specific mode of being active which has acquired a character definite enough for participants in the activity to be recognisable purely and simply by their manner of conducting themselves, by the sorts of problems they pose and by the way in which they set about tackling them. He says in a later essay The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind that an activity combines "making and recognising images, and moving about among them in manners appropriate to their characters"; which may seem a rather portentous way of saying that it combines seeing things from a certain point of view - it may be from the point of view of our own likes and dislikes, or from the point of view of their cause and effect - and comporting oneself accordingly.

But how, in practice, do we recognise a person to be engaged in science, say, as opposed to some other activity such as pure mathematics? In virtue of what do we ascribe a certain way of looking at things to one activity and not to another? Take the case of science. Oakeshott would say that we can recognise a person to be engaged in science and ascribe a certain way of looking at things to science because of what we already know about how science is carried on. That is to say, it is our knowledge of scientific practice that enables us to discriminate between what belongs to science and what does not belong to science; and by scientific practice he has in mind, not
contemporary scientific practice, but the whole tradition of practice in science. Furthermore, it is this same tradition of practice which makes of science one activity. "Its coherence," he says, "lies nowhere but in the way the scientist goes about his investigation, in the traditions of scientific inquiry." It is important to stress here that it is not the existing practice of scientists which gives coherence, since Oakeshott is prepared to envisage an appeal from the way things are done at the present time in science to the greater coherence of the whole tradition of scientific activity. An activity, then, for Oakeshott is a particular way of conducting oneself, and its particularity is rooted in a certain customary or traditional way of setting oneself to act.

However, while an activity is embodied in certain traditional ways of acting, so that it can be said almost that the activity just is those traditions, the traditions themselves do not compose something that could be brought before the mind. This is because, in the first place, they are the expression of practical knowledge, and, second and more important, because it is in the nature of such traditions to form an uncompleted whole.

"(A tradition of behaviour) is neither fixed nor finished; it has no changeless centre to which understanding can anchor itself; there is no sovereign purpose to be perceived or invariable direction to be detected; there is no model to be copied, idea to be realised, or rule to be followed. Some parts of it may change more slowly than others, but none is immune from change. Everything is temporary." One's knowledge of a tradition or, as one might equally well put it, one's skill in an activity, is for that reason not a matter of merely repeating that which has been done before. As Oakeshott notes:

"There is a freedom and inventiveness at the heart of every traditional way of life, and deviation may be an expression of that freedom, springing from a sensitiveness to the tradition itself and remaining faithful to the traditional form."
Of course, this last claim raises problems. What cannot be regarded as an instance of faithfulness to a tradition, if the very deviation from the tradition may be such? But this is not really being fair to Oakeshott. He is not, in the passage quoted, speaking of just any departure from the tradition, but of one which somehow or other maintains its place in the tradition; which is as much as to say that he is not thinking of a deviation in the proper sense at all, but at most of an apparent deviation from the tradition, or of a deviation (real this time, not just apparent) from current practice. All the same, there is a risk involved in emphasising the fluidity of the tradition and the contingent character of its elements, namely that the tradition itself may be made to seem incoherent. Oakeshott's attempt to surmount this danger are worth examining in detail.

Let us consider first the following passage in which he tries to meet the difficulty:

"Though a tradition of behaviour is flimsy and elusive, it is not without identity, and what makes it a possible object of knowledge is the fact that all its parts do not change at the same time and that the changes it undergoes are potential within it."22

I can be excused, I think, for here discounting the fact that all the parts of a tradition do not change at the same time. The latter is relevant, not to any actual coherence in the tradition, but only to the appearance which the tradition offers to the onlooker. Certainly, where parts of something complex are replaced one by one, discontinuity will not be noted. But Oakeshott clearly intends to argue that a tradition has some actual 'principle of continuity', and mere apparent continuity will not serve his turn. The weight of his argument must therefore rest on the claim that changes in the tradition are potential within it.

The claim can be understood in a number of different ways.
I should perhaps begin by saying what I think Oakeshott does not mean. He does not mean, I feel sure, that redirections and reversals in the tradition are potential within it in the sense in which there is an oak potentially in every acorn. That is to say, he does not mean that a tradition must follow some inexorable sequence in its development; that it has, as it were, some inner law of its own unfolding. Coherence is not, for Oakeshott, preserved through any virtue inherent in the tradition. The tradition cannot look after itself; it has to be tended. Nevertheless, those within the tradition, participating in the activity, do not find that it is indifferent to the directions in which innovators would lead it. There is in any tradition, he contends, "A set in a certain direction, a current, something that may be called a prevailing sympathy"; what he elsewhere calls "a propensity to move in some directions rather than others". For those who are sensitive to it this intimates the way in which the tradition is to be carried forward, and the progressive side of any activity consists of just such a 'pursuit of intimations'. Responsibility, however, both for the recognition and the interpretation of such intimations lies with the innovator, and it is always possible for him to wrest the tradition in a contrary direction in his own person. He can be diverted into eddies and backwaters and away from the main stream. One must not forget, also, that there may be disagreement about where exactly the main stream flows. Two explorers of a tradition may put out different reports. In the course of his Reply to Professor Raphael Oakeshott acknowledges as much, and I will return to this later.

For the moment the thing I want to draw attention to is that only certain innovations in the tradition are such that coherence is maintained, the flow of sympathy continued, and which these are must
depend on the tradition as it exists up to that point. The germ of future developments must be there, however indeterminately, in present arrangements. This, surely, is the sense of the following passage (where Oakeshott is speaking of political activity indeed, but in terms which are applicable to activities in general):

"The arrangements which constitute a society capable of political activity . . . are at once coherent and incoherent; they compose a pattern and at the same time they intimate a sympathy for what does not fully appear."23

Like a piece in a jig-saw, the successful innovation can fit into the tradition only because there is already, in a sense, a space prepared for it. The tradition is, then, the given, and the innovator, working within the tradition and attuned to it, gets to sense what novelties it can safely accommodate. And by 'safely accommodate' I mean, accommodate without disruption of continuity. To say, as Oakeshott does, that arrangements within an activity or tradition can be at any time coherent and incoherent is not a very happy way of expressing things. What he wants to say, clearly, is that the tradition is coherent (otherwise why speak of it as being one tradition?), but not in a way which precludes its coherence from taking a different, more comprehensive form. But we cannot then say that the present state of the tradition 'intimates' the form this larger coherence is to take, since to become aware of an 'intimation', in Oakeshott's sense, can be nothing other than to detect an incoherence, Oakeshott having ruled out the possibility that a new direction could be given to a tradition from a point outside it. There is then, as I see it, an inconsistency between what Oakeshott wants to say in explanation of the coherence of a tradition or activity and his general idea of a tradition or activity being something open-ended, and it is this that his talk of
"intimations" and arrangements that are at once coherent and incoherent is designed to resolve. But the difficulty cannot, I think, be got around in that way.

I pointed out earlier that Oakeshott rejected the possibility of explaining the coherence of an activity in terms of the end or ends pursued within it, or in terms of the questions with which it deals. What for him gives coherence is the fact that all the individual essays in the activity can be seen as belonging to a single identifiable tradition of going about things. But this seems only to push the question of coherence back a stage. Is it clear that we are entitled to speak of a single tradition in connection with, for example, science? Certainly, the activities of scientists down the ages go together in some sense; otherwise we would not speak of them as ‘scientists’. But do we have to suppose that what connects them to one another is that each is engaged in carrying on and furthering exactly the same activity? How is the difference, which is obvious, between what Kepler, and still more Democritus, was engaged in and the preoccupations of present-day scientists consistent with their performing the same activity? What must be the nature of those transitions by which an activity is supposed periodically to renew itself, if the tradition is to be kept up and its character as one activity to persist? This, I suggest, is Oakeshott’s problem, and it leads him, in his anxiety to vindicate the coherence of the activity, to the view that what makes it coherent is the fact that any extension of the activity is on the activity’s own terms. In other words, nothing can be grafted on which there is not already a predisposition to receive. (You can, indeed, attempt to force an activity round in a direction which is foreign to it, but you will not be followed; the preponderance of opinion will swing the other, the intimated, way; and your trail-blazing will have left you at a dead
Therefore, it would seem, what binds one stage of an activity to the next is the fact that the later stage is, as it were, fore¬shadowed in the earlier. It is this which justifies one in speaking of a tradition, which renders activities such as science or morality coherent.

In summary what I am saying is this. Oakeshott rejects the usual means by which unity is conferred on an activity and had to look around for a substitute. In attempting to make the activity its own principle of unity "(Science's) coherence lies nowhere but in the way the scientist goes about his investigation" he was confronted by the fact that in an activity - any activity - "Everything is temporary". And how can an activity remain the same if it is all the time becoming something other? The answer he seems to offer (there are discordant passages such as, for example, his statement that in an activity "authority is diffused between past, present, and future" is that it remains the same because, in becoming other, it is merely giving expression to that which was implicit in it at the earlier stage; "the changes it undergoes are potential within it". And that the coherence of an activity can be explained in this way I am not concerned to dispute. But it does seem to me to be inconsistent with the view which Oakeshott also wants to hold that activities are open-ended, that "there is no way of determining an end for activity in advance of the activity itself". For he would seem to be saying that, whether we are aware of it or not, the changes in an activity which can be brought about by our efforts are to a quite significant extent predetermined.

As I see it, it is not inevitable that an account of an activity as something open-ended should be inconsistent with its also being coherent. The inconsistency only arises from the way in which
Oakeshott tries to explain coherence. But there is an alternative way, and it is this I should like now to consider. According to Oakeshott, coherence in an activity depends on the fact that, when there is a departure from the tradition, it is in response to something already there in the tradition. But a tradition can be interpreted in more than one way, can give conflicting messages. As I mentioned before, Oakeshott is perfectly aware of this: "Perhaps it is not too fanciful to say that what we receive from our 'tradition' is a number of 'intimations'." Now either we say that any intimation that gets taken up is the one that maintains the continuity of the tradition (which seems to trivialise Oakeshott's thesis), or we admit that any one of a number of alternatives is as right as any other; and that the important question is not, therefore, which choice is right, but, since which choice we make will determine how the tradition is to be understood, what we consider the tradition to be. The tradition, that is to say, has no constant shape; it is, within reason, what we make it. The tradition appears to us only through the medium of our present interests, and if those interests are innovatory in tendency then the tradition will compose itself in such a way as to seem to point towards the innovation we have in mind. The situation is not that the new element has to accommodate itself to an already defined tradition ('Can it maintain a place in the flow of sympathy or not?'); it is rather one in which what is new and what is old accommodate themselves to one another. One finds just such an account of tradition and originality in T.S. Eliot's essay Tradition and the Individual Talent:

"The necessity that (the artist) shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided. What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.
The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is the conformity between the old and the new. 197

This is, to all appearances, a quite different conception from Oakeshott's. For we should have to say of a tradition as so conceived that, left to itself, it points nowhere, intimates nothing in particular. It is we who, in our traversing of the tradition, pick out this or that feature, which then becomes for us something to plot a course by. Our conviction that such and such an innovation is called for and our conviction that the tradition is to be 'read' in just such and such a way are one and the same. And, that being so, Oakeshott's talk of 'pursuing intimations' must be considered as, at best, a manner of speaking. To be fair, he comes very close to admitting this. I am thinking now of his 1965 Reply to Professor Raphael. Some parts of this have been quoted already, but it is important enough to merit quotation at length.

"Now, it is true that we cannot expect a straight answer from our somewhat miscellaneous beliefs, preferences, approvals, disapprovals, etc. They do not provide a single, unambiguous norm. Perhaps, then, it is not too fanciful to say that what we receive from our 'tradition' is a number of 'intimations'. Certainly, what we receive does not point in a single direction; there are many messages, but no categorical injunction. Indeed, what we receive may be described as a number of aids to reflection to be used in deciding upon and in justifying our responses to practical situations. Our task is never that of judging conduct or a proposal by referring it to a unique and undeniable norm; it is that of determining the relative importance, in given circumstances, of the numerous competing normative and prudential considerations which compose our tradition. What is sought is a decision which promises the most acceptable balance in the circumstances between competing goods; and what we expect in justification of a choice is argument to persuade us that what was sought has been achieved." 33

But there is, I think, an ambiguity even in this passage. It is not clear whether Oakeshott is saying that there is no norm or optimum
solution that one's decision could correspond to, or whether he is saying merely that one cannot ever be sure, in a concrete case, what the norm or optimum solution is.

But does this alternative way of viewing tradition make it any easier to explain how an activity is coherent? At first glance, it would seem to aggravate the problem. For if the transformations to which activities are subject are the result not of some process within the activity itself by which one stage intimates and leads into the next, but of isolated forays on the part of individuals who make their own selective epitome of past practice, it becomes much harder to see wherein the coherence of the activity lies. It is no good to say that it lies in their selecting from the one tradition, since the whole question is how it can be said to be one tradition. And this is an objection to which, it seems to me, Oakeshott's own account is vulnerable. That is to say, Oakeshott simply takes over the idea of there being a tradition of (for example) moral activity, without properly considering whether, if morality is as he says it is, definable neither in terms of ends to be pursued nor in terms of questions to be asked, the idea of a tradition is still intelligible. But surely we cannot speak of a 'tradition' in connection with morality unless we can say what it is about successive 'moralities' that makes them successive stages in one and the same activity. And that is as much as to say that we cannot speak about a 'tradition of moral activity' unless we can say in what respect moral activity is coherent. Oakeshott seems to want to say that its coherence lies in its conformity to the tradition of moral activity, but it is obvious now that such an explanation is circular.

The position, then, is as follows: we are only entitled to speak
confidently of a 'tradition' in some activity if we can say when something is and when it is not an instance of that activity, and we cannot do this by referring to a tradition about which our right to talk is the very thing at issue. Does this not mean, though, a return to explaining activities in terms of their ends or in terms of the sorts of questions they deal with? And what, then, of Oakeshott's criticism, that such explanations are never anything more than abridgements of current practice from which the continuing activities in time always free themselves? This criticism seems to me still to carry a lot of weight. But these are not, as it happens, the only possibilities. The possibility I should myself think most worth examining and which follows on from my remarks in the previous chapter is that an activity, and, in particular, moral activity, owes its coherence to the intention by which it is governed.

According to the view I was developing in Chapter Four, when a person asks himself 'What is my duty?' and in so doing comes to think of himself as having a duty to do some certain specific thing, he is engaged in a quite distinct activity, namely the activity of intending his duty. The activity and the intending are really one and the same. Well, with regard to moral activity in general, I am suggesting something similar: that in every case in which men engage in moral inquiry or take moral decisions (and these for me are simply two aspects of the same moral activity) they have in common their intending an action which, taking all possible points of view into consideration, would be that most appropriate to their particular situation. Such a view as it stands is no doubt too narrow. For example, it needs to be widened to accommodate those who do not see morality so much in terms of performing individual actions as in terms of realising a certain kind
of ideal. But between a person intending the action most appropriate to his circumstances and a person intending a certain ideal in circumstances that require him to decide between alternative courses of action, the difference seems to me one of emphasis merely. The former is no more able to treat actions as being totally discrete than the latter is to stay aloof from making decisions in particular cases. In any event, I am quite prepared to settle for the suggestion that what makes one moral agent to be engaged in the same activity as another is not, in every case, that their intentions in acting perfectly correspond, but simply that there is a recognisable analogy between the ways in which they intend what they do. And the analogy between someone's intending his duty and someone's intending an ideal (where it is a moral ideal) resides, to my mind, in the fact that they are both alike cases of intending something as appropriate taking all possible points of view into consideration. In other words, specifically moral intending is an intending to act in the light of an exhaustive consideration of the different interests that it is possible to take in any situation.

Is an account of morality in terms of such an intention open to the criticism levelled by Oakeshott at accounts of morality in terms of its ends, or its characteristic questions? It is very difficult to say. It is true that the account is abstract. But Oakeshott, one would think, can hardly be objecting to what is, inevitably, a feature of any account. And it is perfectly possible to see his objection to certain kinds of account as being not that they are abstracts of the activity, but that they are abstracts of what is, at best, a localised and therefore one-sided manner of pursuing the activity. In which case, it could be that the account I am suggesting, which specifies no
particular content for morality, by that very fact is neutral with respect to different manners of pursuing morality, and so satisfactory.

On the other hand, one could imagine Oakeshott complaining that, if this was all we knew about morality, then we could not really claim to 'know about morality' at all; for, so the argument might run, to know about morality or any other activity is necessarily to know about it in its particularity. And, taking this complaint in a certain sense, I should agree. That is to say, I should agree that the phrase 'all possible interests that one could take in a situation' by itself is quite empty, and that it gets a measure of concreteness only by being conjoined with what we know of the interests people actually take in things. Similarly, the phrase 'intending one's duty' by itself is empty; if it does not seem entirely so, it is because we interpret it in the light of what we know of how, in actual cases, people set about determining what their duty is. But it was never my intention to offer an account of morality which would be sufficient in itself or which could stand as an alternative to Oakeshott's own. What I was trying to provide was, so to say, a formula for moral action; something which would explain how apparently contrasting styles of morality can yet exemplify the same activity. And it is no objection to what is, after all, only a formula that it needs to be supplemented by knowledge of how the formula is satisfied in particular cases.

So far I have been considering how an intentional account of moral activity might supply a deficiency remarked upon in Oakeshott's own account of things, viz. his failure to explain, without circularity, in what way moral activity is coherent. However, this seems an appropriate point at which to turn to considering how the latter's account of moral activity, as a participating in a concrete tradition of behaviour, might contribute to resolving certain questions outstanding about the
intentional account itself. For example, faced by a theory in which moral activity is spoken of as an 'intending one's duty' or an 'intending the ideal', a person might well ask how it is that anyone originally acquires such notions as 'my duty' or 'the ideal'. The implication of which might be that, until we know how people acquire such notions in the first place, we cannot be sure if it is intelligible that they should function in moral thinking in the way that the theory says. In answer to this, it is useful to be able to stress the concrete, customary aspect of moral activity: in as much as we can admit that for all of us morality must begin in our conforming to a certain traditional manner of behaviour, within which the notions of 'my duty' and 'the ideal' have a definite, if continuously varying, content; and yet go on to say that gradually, perhaps through our being exposed to other moral traditions, these notions take on for us a different character, become attenuated as to their content, and finally function in our thinking without any content at all. At which point they are what I called 'regulatory ideas'. It is in some such way, I suggest, that we acquire the regulatory ideas with which we operate in moral thinking.

It might also be asked how, starting from the empty, regulatory idea of 'my duty', one could ever set about giving content to it. But the answer to this should by now be plain. One does not start from an empty idea of 'my duty' and then cast about for ways in which it can be filled out. On the contrary, I should say that one starts from an idea of 'my duty' which is thoroughly concrete, and which gets its concreteness from the particular tradition of moral behaviour in which one is brought up. At which stage, to do one's duty just is to do actions which have this or that certain character and to eschew actions of another sort. It is only gradually, with the widening of experience
(experience of conflict among 'duties', experience of different conceptions of duty), that one begins to distinguish between an action's having a certain character and its being one's duty, and thus begins to think of an action's having such a character as a fact perhaps relevant to its being one's duty, but not, all the same, what its being 'one's duty' means. So that, as I see the matter, one arrives at the idea of 'my duty' through a process by which the ties between 'my duty' and the forms which 'my duty' takes in one's particular moral tradition are progressively loosened, but never finally severed. And that being the case, however empty in itself the idea of 'my duty' is, one is never without some notion of how to give content to it.

Of course, the way in which we think to give content to the idea will vary with the particular moral tradition we happen to inhabit. It is one of the more puzzling aspects of Oakeshott's discussion of moral activity that he speaks all the time of the tradition of moral behaviour, as if there were only one, whereas it does rather seem to me (and is implied in my remarks above) that in morality we have to deal with not one unitary tradition, but a number of different, more or less independent traditions. One has therefore to suppose either that Oakeshott thinks there is some all-encompassing tradition of human moral behaviour in which the different local traditions (i.e. local in time and space) are included, or that his remarks are all the time directed to the moral tradition of, let us say, Western Europe. But - to take the first alternative - it is stretching the word 'tradition' to say that the morality of contemporary Europe and that of nineteenth century Australian Aborigines belong to the same tradition of behaviour. We should, I think, more naturally say that they belong to two distinct traditions, albeit traditions in one and the same activity. If, on
the other hand, the second alternative is the right one, then one must conclude that, when Oakeshott describes morality as an activity, a particular coherent way of going about things, he is not describing morality as such at all, but is referring to the particularity and coherence of the European moral tradition. And consequently he can have nothing to contribute to what seems to me the really interesting question, which is how a European and an Aborigine can be said both to be carrying on, in their moral lives, the same activity.

Without prejudging the point of interpretation, one may yet suggest that the real value of Oakeshott's account of activities and their relation to a tradition is as a contribution to our understanding of particular moralities. And it is in this sense that I take Oakeshott's views to complement my own. For an understanding of morality as a whole requires, as I see it, that we understand both the universal character of moral action and how this may be embodied in a particular tradition of moral behaviour.

A single example may help to bring out the necessity of taking account of both aspects of morality. I remarked earlier in this chapter upon the ambivalence of philosophers with regard to the question whether morality is a matter of skill or not. Now this ambivalence, I suggest, is a result of their not distinguishing morality in its universal character from the different manners of pursuing morality which are embodied in different moral traditions. What then should one say about this? Well, first of all, one might admit that there can be skill shown in the management of some particular moral tradition. We all of us know people who are, so to say, badly educated in their moral tradition and whose attempts to pick their way about the tradition are noticeably faltering and unfree. Others, on the
contrary, impress us by the quality of their moral savoir-faire. There is no question in my mind that a moral tradition can be handled imaginatively and skilfully as well as mechanically and feebly, and to this extent I agree with Oakeshott. But does all this amount to skill in morality as such? I think not. If, as I have been suggesting, morality is best thought of as a way of intending, skill is ruled out. For in intending there is no room for skill. One cannot intend well or badly, successfully or unsuccessfully. And here perhaps is the explanation of the adequacy in morality of the good will. Interestingly enough, Oakeshott himself speaks of the good will in a passage which is never properly harmonised with his overall view of moral activity, and which can be taken as, in essence, what I am saying about moral activity itself.

"Further, there is, perhaps, in 'moral goodness' (as distinguished from 'virtuous conduct', 'excellence of character', or the engagement in 'good works') a release from the deadliness of doing and a possibility of perfection, which intimates poetry. For here is a private and self-sufficient activity, not accommodated to the world, emancipated from place or condition, in which each engagement is independent of what went before and of what may come after, in which no man is ineligible to engage on account of ignorance or inexpertness in judging the probable consequences of actions, or (as Kant says) by reason of some special disfavour of destiny or by the niggardly endowment of a step-motherly Nature, and in which success is entirely independent of 'usefulness' or external achievement."

I have put off to the last consideration of the most general objections that can be brought against the view of morality I have been outlining. If even now I do not deal with them at any great length, this is not because I think they are easily answered. Quite the contrary, in fact. It is because I think the answering of them (one of them at least) would take us too far beyond the particular view we are here considering; and it seems to me more important, within the
context of this thesis, that the view in question should be set out as challengingly and as unencumbered as possible, together with the reasons which seem to me to make necessary so radical a departure from our ordinary ways of thinking. Thus my replies to the objections will no more than suggest the way in which, I think, a fully adequate reply might go.

What are these 'most general objections'? In the course of this and the previous chapter, I have been developing an account of morality which, roughly speaking, is as follows: that morality is first and foremost an activity rather than a field of experience or a style of reasoning; that this activity is a matter not so much of what we do, as of how we intend what we do; and that, in short, morality just is, as we might express it, a certain mode of intending (the intending to act in the light of all possible interests that one could take in one's situation). The objections I have in mind as being, specifically, objections to this view as a whole and not just some part of it are, first, that there could not be such an activity as I have described, that morality, purely as a mode of intending, is impossible; and secondly, that even if morality were an activity in the sense I have described, yet it would inevitably be an activity on the periphery of serious living, something which it would be quite irrational to pursue as a matter of central concern.

The first objection is expressed very forcibly by Prichard himself. He says, a propos of Kant's moral philosophy, that "If he succeeds in persuading us that our idea that there can be actions which we ought to do is false, he will render it impossible for us to act morally, for we cannot be led to act on an idea which we know to be false, and therefore no longer have." Put in terms of my own view, this says
that it is possible to intend to do one's duty only so long as one supposes that there are, in fact, duties to be done; that is, only so long as one supposes that morality is not purely a matter of intending. If, on the contrary, one holds that there are no such 'actual' duties, but that 'my duty' is a regulatory idea only and that morality is, in consequence, purely a matter of intending to do one's duty, one thereby makes it impossible for a person to act morally, even in one's own terms. For a person can only intend to do that which he thinks he may do. And there is no way in which a person can think he may do his duty, if he holds there is no such thing.

I have already sketched out (in Chapter Four) how I think this objection might be met. What has to be grasped, I said, is that the view that morality is a matter of intending to do one's duty involves a reinterpreting of the notion of 'intending to do one's duty'. Whereas we naturally think of 'intending to do one's duty' on the model of expressions such as 'intending to do one's job'; as meaning, in other words, 'intending to do that which is one's duty', the parallel, as I see it, is rather with the expression 'intending to do one's best'. 'One's best' does not signify some actual maximum of achievement which, for all that he intended it, a person might miss. No one, for example, ever thinks to ask, of a person who is intent on doing his best, whether, all the same, he is succeeding in doing it. His intending and his doing seem, in respect of 'his best', to be one and the same thing. And the explanation of this, I suggest, is that 'one's best' in the expression 'intending to do one's best' does not refer to that which one intends to do, but to, so to say, how one conceives of that which one intends to do. To intend to do one's best is always to intend to do something as one's best. Here, then, is the pattern of
what we might say in the case of 'intending to do one's duty'. First of all, 'one's duty' as such is nothing apart from one's intending to do it; it is not something outside of one's intending to which one's intending might be directed, as it might be directed, for example, to throwing a line to a drowning man; intending to do one's duty always comes down to intending to do some such action as one's duty.

Secondly, and this is the crucial point, intending to do something as one's duty is a different thing altogether from intending to do something in the belief that it is one's duty. Prichard's objection to defining morality purely in terms of an intending to do one's duty rests, as I see it, on an assumption, which I am here questioning, that intending to do one's duty is necessarily a matter of intending to do something in the belief that it is one's duty. This is why he speaks about "an idea which we know to be false", the idea, namely that something is in fact one's duty. And given that assumption, what he says is surely correct. A person cannot believe that something is his duty and, therefore, cannot intend to do it in that belief, if he holds that there is no action which is his duty. But, then, I was not suggesting he could. The view I was putting forward is that, when a person intends to do his duty, his 'intending his duty' forms a single element, a distinct mode of intending which, through the thinking that is integral to it, takes to itself successively different contents. And in that case, there is nothing outside his intending (no belief or lack of it) which determines whether or not he can intend something as a duty.

Beyond that, for the present, I do not mean to go. As it stands, what I have said about there being a mode of intending which is fully autonomous, the possibility of which does not depend upon anything
outside of itself, is only a suggestion; and I myself do not see any way in which one could test the suggestion other than by continuing to build upon it and trying to render it step by step more concrete. In that way either it will prove itself in practice, as we become more familiar with it, or the contradictions inherent in it, if there be such, will force us to abandon it altogether. However, what one can do at this stage is clear up misconceptions about what exactly it is I am saying, and it is with this aim that I want to consider the second of the two objections I indicated.

It is that, while morality might indeed be an autonomous activity or autonomous mode of intending such as I have described, yet it would inevitably then be something, so to speak, 'out on a limb', not an integral part of the texture of rational living. And surely, whatever account we give of morality, it cannot be such as to allow that to be said of it? Now, as regards this last point, I certainly agree. No account of morality would be adequate which makes it difficult or impossible to see how moral concerns could **rightfully** take a central place in the thinking of a rational being. I am only questioning whether the account I have given is such as to create a difficulty of this kind. I think I can see why people might feel that there is a difficulty. To mention one point from among others: in Chapter Four, in the course of explaining what I meant by saying that morality is an autonomous activity, I proposed as a suitable analogy the autonomy of the game of chess. I said that, in the same way in which chess is a wrestling with problems which neither pre-exist chess nor have any existence independent of it, so morality is a wrestling with problems and demands which, properly speaking, only come to be within the activity of morality itself. And it is, I think, an understandable
response to this way of speaking that a person should say 'Well, then, your view is that morality is only a game'.

In certain cases, no doubt, a person's saying this will signify nothing more than a failure, on his part, to appreciate that things which are analogous in some certain respect are not necessarily analogous in all. In which case, it may be possible to meet the objection by stressing that there are games and games; that while chess is 'only a game' (i.e. an amusement or diversion) in that it involves an intending to act in the context of an entirely arbitrary set of rules, morality, on the other hand, is the intending to act in the context of rules which, by definition, are not arbitrary but reflect all possible interests which a rational agent could take in deciding to act. So that while morality might indeed be a game, it is a game of a very different order from the things normally so called. And that, it may be said, would go some way towards removing the difficulty we may feel about a 'game' taking a central place in rational thinking.

However, I believe the objection may go deeper. In saying that morality is only a game, a person may have in mind specifically the point that morality, as I represent the matter, is not a means of meeting demands or of pursuing goals which already exist (i.e. which exist in advance of anyone's engagement in morality), but a particular way of being active in relation to demands and goals which themselves only arise within the activity. For there is an extremely widespread, if not always clearly articulated view according to which to behave rationally is to behave objectively, to conduct oneself in a way appropriate to the object or objects with which one is dealing.!

According to this view, rationality consists in facing up to the world as it really is and in adapting one's actions so as to anticipate and
overcome the different problems that confront us in the world, be they physical, social or whatever. From this perspective, an activity which springs up spontaneously, which exists for nothing outside of itself, which exists, that is to say, only to resolve problems which come into being with the activity itself, is a kind of scandal. It is not irrational necessarily. But the rationality of pursuing it is made to depend on its having some discoverable function. For instance, it may be that it helps to develop powers which can be used in other, more directly rational activities, or it may serve, in the appropriate circumstances, as recreation or amusement. Perhaps, then, this is what lies behind the objection that to represent morality as an autonomous activity is inevitably to place it somewhere on the periphery of rational living.

If it is, then it is clear enough that the way to meet the objection is to criticise the view of rationality on which it is based. And that it needs to be criticised, I think most philosophers would agree. Where they might not agree is on the extent of the criticism which is necessary. It is not enough, as I see it, to say that whether one's behaviour is or is not appropriate to some object depends upon what one happens to be doing (more exactly, intending to do), and that, therefore, there is no way of behaving which is appropriate or inappropriate to the object except by reference to the activity in which one is engaged. One needs also to say, in my opinion, that, except by reference to the activities in which human beings as a whole engage, there are no 'objects' either. What we think of as objects and states of affairs are themselves representations - what Oakeshott would call 'images' - which belong as surely to an activity, a specific mode of intending, as do the 'duties' and 'ideals' I have been speaking about
in connection with the activity of morality.

What exactly this activity is (if, indeed, it is a distinct activity and not simply a quasi-activity built up from elements common to different activities), and how it comes to have the dominant place in our culture that it seems to have, are questions which I cannot pursue here. That I mention these matters at all is only that I might thereby correct a misapprehension which could arise about the view of morality I have been developing. It is that what I have been saying about morality, that it is an autonomous mode of intending, applies to morality only, or only to a small exceptional group of activities. But this is not my view at all. What I have been saying about morality, I hold to be true of rational activity in all its forms, in science, for example, and in art. And I am inclined to think, without, I am afraid, being able to demonstrate the matter, that it is only because it is true of rational activity universally that it can be true of morality.

There, perhaps abruptly, I want to leave the discussion. But let me, finally, review what I have tried to do in this chapter. I have tried to fill out the view that morality is an activity in two respects. I have tried to show how the activity of morality is related to the different concrete 'practices' or 'traditions' of morality. Secondly, in this final section, I have tried to sketch out how I think morality is related to other forms of rational activity.
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(H.B. Unless otherwise indicated, all references in this chapter are to H. Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays.*

1. p. 248
2. p. 210
3. p. 248
4. p. 105
5. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1964-5, p. 4
6. " " " " 1964-5, p. 19
7. " " " " 1949-50, p. 141
8. p. 84
9. pp. 7-8
10. p. 11
11. p. 8
12. p. 101
13. p. 90
14. p. 91
15. p. 99
16. p. 97
17. p. 98
18. p. 204
19. p. 103
20. p. 128
21. p. 65
22. p. 128 *Hy italics*
23. p. 108
24. Political Studies, 1965, p. 92
25. p. 124
26. p. 103
27. p. 128
28. p. 128 My italics
29. p. 128
30. p. 91
31. Political Studies, 1965, p. 91
32. T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood, pp. 49-50
33. Political Studies, 1965, p. 91
34. p. 245
35. cf., for example, J. Macmurray, Reason and Emotion, p. 19
I have tried in the course of this thesis to do two things. First of all, I have tried to show how the questions which moral philosophers think to put to themselves, the way in which they initially conceive of morality, the particular descriptions under which they come to analyse it, are not matters of little moment, but affect their ability to make sense of whole areas of our thinking about morality. In what I have said about twentieth century ethics, I have taken H.A. Prichard as a focal figure. On the one hand, he stands firmly within the intuitionist camp, among those who see morality primarily in terms of the experience or experiences which give rise to moral behaviour (or not, as the case may be). On the other hand, he is also the philosopher whose refusal to duck or gloss over a difficulty has highlighted problems which are themselves, I suggest, impossible to resolve within an intuitionist framework. And not only within that framework, of course. For if I am right, these same problems regarding the ultimate basis of obligation and the ultimate ground we have to act morally, arise also for philosophers who in respect of morality are operating with a quite different set of assumptions from Hartmann or Prichard, and for them too seem unresolvable. In view of what I have said, then, I think that I have done enough to underline my opening remarks in the Introduction about the importance for one's ethics of asking the right sort of questions about morality.

On the positive side, I have tried to show, by practical example as it were, how our whole way of conceiving of morality can be altered by us, for a moment, suspending our preconceptions about what are central problems for ethics and what are only peripheral and simply answering
each problem in the way that it, individually, seems to require. And this is, I think, relevant to how we decide in favour of one way of conceiving morality as opposed to another. That is to say, we can feel satisfied with the conception we have only so long as we are continually exposing it to as many different kinds of problem and paradox as morality itself seems to hold. Within this thesis, of course, the particular problems under consideration were those which Prichard, in particular, brought to our attention and which therefore had already, so to speak, a 'history' in recent ethical discussion. This made our search for a solution much easier than it would otherwise have been. But that there are other problems equally worth considering, I have no doubt, such as e.g. the question whether morality is primarily a matter of bringing about 'good' results or whether it is a matter rather of exhibiting a 'good' will. It is only in this way, by keeping as open a mind as possible, that I think we can avoid a premature closing of the issue so far as morality is concerned, with what that entails for our ethics. And it is in this spirit that I mean the suggestion that morality is primarily moral action to be taken, as a reopening of the question, what is the nature of morality itself?
APPENDIX

EMOTIVISM

It may seem strange that in a critical survey of twentieth century ethics in English discussion of emotivism should be left over to an appendix. The reason for this lies in the need, on the one side, to have some relatively consistent mode of treatment for the different theories being discussed, and, on the other, in the character of emotivism itself. At the beginning of Chapter Three I mentioned why I thought it best not to consider it on a level with intuitionism and the theories which centre on moral reasoning. I said, first of all, that for the most part the proponents of emotivism were not principally interested in ethics and so had little incentive to work beyond the first crude expression of their view. Secondly, I said that emotivism is, at bottom, less a theory of ethics and more the turning away from such a theory, the denial that there is anything for there to be a theory about. Now I do not want to leave the matter there. I want to show, by amplifying these two points, that they tie in together, that the failure to develop a fully-fledged emotivist theory is not just a case of certain philosophers happening to have their interests elsewhere, but can be accounted for by the very character of emotivism.

In saying that emotivism is less a theory of ethics and more the turning away from such a theory, I have it in mind to make the point that the emotivist approach to morality is essentially a reductivist one. That is, it involves explaining the moral distinctions we make in terms of feelings or attitudes which themselves have no distinctive moral character. No one supposes A.J. Ayer, for example, to be suggesting
(in *Language, Truth and Logic*) that our use of moral expressions, such as 'Stealing is wrong', discloses the working in us of peculiarly moral emotions, whatever these might be. It would be a mistake, therefore, for anyone to imagine that we could treat emotivism as an attempt to explain morality in terms of feeling, comparable to the attempts to explain it in terms of moral experience and moral reasoning respectively. For there is preserved in these latter the idea of there being, so to say, a moral domain, a something or other constituted in a way peculiar to itself, the study of which is the business, specifically, of the moral philosopher. Whereas, to speak of an emotivist moral philosopher or of an emotivist theory of morality as such is practically a contradiction in terms. The emotivist approach is distinguished precisely by its refusal to draw a cordon round morality and moral issues, by its insistence that they must be seen as elements in some wider whole. And this is the reason that I think that, for an emotivist, ethics as such could not be of central interest.

But, it might be said, all this is beside the point. Let it be granted that emotivism is not a theory of ethics in quite the sense in which intuitionism, for example, is such a theory. It certainly is a theory of ethics in the sense of a theory about morality, and surely, for discussion in the context of this thesis, that is all that matters.

There are two things I should like to say about this. First of all, as I noted in the Introduction, my survey of twentieth century ethics is conducted with a certain point in mind, the aim being to show the difficulties which arise from taking anything other than moral action as the central subject for analysis in ethics. In my opinion, consideration of emotivism could have contributed nothing to this, and so it finds no place in the main text of the thesis. But secondly,
emotivism seems to me to present the moral philosopher with a problem of a very special kind. I myself do not see how one could hope to demonstrate that an emotivist account of morality is unsatisfactory. Certainly, one could feel it to be unsatisfactory oneself, but this involves, I think, taking a certain view of morality, having the feeling that 'there is more to it than that'. And the onus, I should say, is on the person who has this feeling to suggest how it may be justified. What I am saying is not that there is a presumption in favour of emotivism (if anything, the presumption looks to be the other way), but that emotivism in relation to other theories of ethics occupies a sort of bedrock position. At least there is no doubting that moral language can be used, and indeed very often is used, in the way the emotivists say, as a means of expressing and evoking personal attitudes. The only question is whether such a use is not parasitical upon some other primary use, and that is a question which can be answered only by someone providing a satisfactory account of what this primary use might be. In defect of such an alternative, emotivism holds its own.

According to this view, emotivism in some form or other is bound to be a recurring phenomenon in the history of ethics, springing up at every check in the search for an adequate philosophical understanding of morality. And that being the case, it is, as I see it, pointless to emphasise this or that respect in which it itself may be inadequate. The only effective retort is to take up again the search for a more adequate theory of ethics; and this is what I have tried to do in this thesis.
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